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# THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY.

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BY

WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

*Author's Edition*

VOL. I.

EDINBURGH
DAVID DOUGLAS, CASTLE STREET
1882

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Edinburgh University Press:
T. AND A. CONSTABLE, PRINTERS TO HER MAJESTY

# THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY.

## I.

SOME years ago, at a time when the rapid growth of the city was changing the character of many localities, two young men were sitting, one afternoon early in April, in the parlour of a house on one of those streets which, without having yet accomplished their destiny as business thoroughfares, were no longer the homes of the decorous ease that once inhabited them. The young men held their hats and canes in their hands, and they had that air of having just been admitted and of waiting to be received by the people of the house which rests gracefully only on persons of the other sex. One was tall and spare, and he sat stiffly expectant; the other, who was much shorter and stouter, with the mature bloom which comes of good living and a cherished digestion, was more

restless. As he rose from his chair, after a few moments, and went to examine some detail of the dim room, he moved with a quick, eager step, and with a stoop which suggested a connoisseur's habit of bending over and peering at things. He returned to his seat, and glanced round the parlour, as if to seize the whole effect more accurately.

"So this is the home of the Pythoness, is it?" he said.

"If you like to call her a Pythoness," answered the other.

"Oh, I don't know that I prefer it: I'm quite willing to call her a test-medium. I thought perhaps Pythoness would respectfully idealise the business. What a queer, melancholy house; what a queer, melancholy street! I don't think I was ever in a street before where quite so many professional ladies, with English surnames, preferred Madame to Mrs. on their door-plates. And the poor old place has such a desperately conscious air of going to the deuce. Every house seems to wince as you go by, and button itself up to the chin for fear you should find out it had no shirt on,—so to speak. I don't know what's the reason, but these material tokens of a social decay afflict me terribly: a tipsy

woman isn't dreadfuller than a haggard old house, that 's once been a home, in a street like this."

"The street 's going the usual way," said the other. "It will be all business in a few years."

"But in the meantime it causes me inexpressible anguish, and it will keep doing it. If I know where there 's a thorn, I can't help going up and pressing my waistcoat against it. I foresee that I shall keep coming. This parlour alone is poignant enough to afford me the most rapturous pain; it pierces my soul. This tawdry red velvet wall-paper; the faded green reps of that sofa; those family photographs in their oval papier-mâché frames; that round table there in the corner, with its subscription literature and its tin-type albums; and this frantic tapestry carpet! I know now why the ghost-seers affect this sort of street and this sort of parlour: the spirits can't resist the deadly fascination! *No* ghost, with any strength of character, could keep away. I suppose that this apartment is swarming now, with disembodied ladies and gentlemen of the first distinction. Well, I like your going into this. I respect everybody's superstition—except my own; I can't respect that, you know."

"Do you think I believe in these people's rubbish?"

"I didn't know. A man must believe in something. I couldn't think of anything else you believed in. I'm not sure I don't believe in it a trifle, myself; my nerves do. May I ask why you come here, if you refuse the particular rubbish afforded by the establishment? You're not a curious man."

"Why did you come?"

"You asked me. Besides, I have no occasion for a reason. I am an emotional, not a rational being, as I've often told you."

The taller man laughed drily. "Very well, then, you don't need a reason from me. You can wait and see why I came."

The short man gave a shrug. "I hope I shan't have to wait long. An emotional being has a right to be unreasonably impatient."

A light sound of hesitating steps made itself heard in the next room; the two men remained silent, and presently one of the partition doors was rolled back, and a tall young girl in a somewhat theatrical robe of white serge, with a pale green scarf on her shoulders, appeared at the threshold. Her beautiful, serious face had a pallid quiet, broken by what seemed the unnatural alert-

ness of her blue eyes, which glanced quickly, like those of a child too early obliged to suspect and avert; her blonde hair, which had a plastic massiveness, was drawn smoothly back from her temples, and lay heaped in a heavy coil on her neck, where its rich abundance showed when she turned her profile away, as if to make sure that some one was following in the room behind her. A door opened and closed there, and she came on towards the two men, who had risen. At sight of the taller of the two she halted, while an elderly gentleman hurried forward, with a bustling graciousness, and offered him his small, short hand. He had the same fair complexion as the girl, but his face was bright and eager; his thin, light hair was wavy and lustreless; he looked hardly so tall as she. He had a mouth of delicacy and refinement, and a smile of infantine sweetness.

"Ah, you 've really come," he said, shaking the young man's hand cordially. "So many people manifest an interest in our public séances, and then let the matter drop without going any further. I don't know whether I presented you to my daughter, the other day, Mr. Ford?"

Ford bowed gravely to the girl, who slightly returned his obeisance. "Let me

introduce Mr. Phillips, Dr. Boynton, — a friend whom I ventured to bring with me."

"Very glad to see you, Mr. Phillips. I was about to say—Oh! my daughter, Mr. Phillips, Miss Egeria Boynton. Take seats, gentlemen—I was about to say that one of the most curious facts connected with the phenomena is the ardour with which people take the matter up on first acquaintance, and the entire indifference with which they let it drop. In our line of life, Mr. Phillips, as public exhibitors, we often have occasion to note this. It seldom happens but half a dozen persons come to me at the close of a séance, and ask earnestly for the privilege of pursuing their investigations with the aid of my daughter's mediumship. But these persons rarely call; I rarely see them at a second public séance, even. If I had not such abiding hopes of the phenomena myself, I should sometimes feel discouraged by the apathy and worse than apathy with which they are received, not the first, but the second time. You must excuse my expression of surprise at first greeting you, Mr. Ford,—you must indeed. It was but too natural under the circumstances."

"By all means," answered Ford. "I never thought of not coming. But I can't

promise that you 'll find me a ready believer."

"Precisely," returned the other. "That is the very mood in which I could have wished you to come. I am myself, as I think I told you, merely an inquirer. In fact"— Dr. Boynton leaned forward, with his small, plump hands extended, as if the more conveniently to round his periods, but arrested himself, in the explanation he was about to make, at something Mr. Phillips was saying to his daughter.

"I couldn't help being interested in the character of your parlour, before you came in, Miss Boynton. These old Boston houses all have so much character. It 's surprising what good taste people had fifty or sixty years ago,—the taste of the First Empire. That cornice is very pretty,—very simple and very refined, neither glutted nor starved in design ; and that mantel,—how refreshing those sane and decent straight lines are after the squirms and wriggles of subsequent marble ! I don't know that I should have chosen urns for an ornament to the corners ; but we must not forget that we are mortal ; and there *are* cinerary associations with fireplaces."

Miss Boynton said nothing in return for

this speech, the full sense of which had perhaps not quite reached her. She stared blankly at Phillips, to whom her father turned with his most winning smile. "An artist?" asked Dr. Boynton.

"A sufferer in the cause of art," returned Phillips with ironical pathos.

"Ah! A connoisseur," said the doctor.

"The fact is," said Phillips, "I was finding the modern equipment of your old-fashioned parlour intolerable, as you came in. You won't mind my not liking your landlady's taste, Miss Boynton?" he demanded with suave ingratiation.

Miss Boynton looked about the room, as if she had not seen it before. "It *is* ugly," she answered quietly. "But it does as well as any."

"Yes," her father eagerly interposed, "better than any other room in any other house in any other quarter of the city. We are still, as I may say, gentlemen, feeling our way towards what we believe a sublime truth. My daughter's development is yet so recent, so incomplete, that we must not reject any furthering influences, however humble, however disagreeable. It is not by our own preference that we are here. I know, as well as you do, that this is a street

inhabited by fortune-tellers and charlatans of low degree. For that very reason I have taken our lodgings here. The element, the atmosphere, of simple, unquestioning faith brought into this vicinity by the dupes of these people is, unknown to them, of the highest use, the most vital advantage, to us in our present attempt. At the same time, I should not, I could not in candour, deny to these pretenders themselves a beneficial, a highly—I may call it—evolutionary, influence upon my daughter. We desire no personal acquaintance with them. But they are of the old tradition of supernaturalism, —a tradition as old as nature,—and we cannot afford to reject the favour of the tradition which they represent. You will understand that, gentlemen. We cannot say, We hold —or we trust we hold—communion with spirits, and yet deny that there is something in second-sight, divination, or whatever mysteries these people pretend to. In some sort, we must psychologically ally ourselves with them. They are, no doubt, for the most part and in most cases, shameless swindlers; but it seems to be a condition of our success that we shall not deny—I don't say that we shall believe—the fact of an occult power in some of them. Their neighbourhood was very

repulsive at first, and still is measurably so; but we accept it, and have found it of advantage. We are mere experimenters, as yet, and claim nothing except that my daughter is the medium, the instrument, of certain phenomena which *we* can explain only in one way; we do not dispute the different explanations of others. In the course of our investigations, we neglect no theory, however slight, that may assist us. Now, in so simple a matter as dress, even: we have found by repeated experiment that the manifestations have a greater affinity for white than any other colour. This may point to some hidden truth—I don't say —in the old-fashioned ghost-stories, where the spectre always appears in white. At any rate, we think it worth while that my daughter should wear white, in both her public and her private séances, for the present. And green,—just now we seem to find a good effect in pale green, Mr. Phillips, pale green."

"If I may say it without impertinence to Miss Boynton's father, in my character of connoisseur," said Phillips, with a bow for the young girl, which he delivered to the doctor, "I think the effect is very good indeed."

"Ah! yes, yes!" cried the doctor. "In that sense. I see. Very good. However, I meant"— Dr. Boynton paused, bending on either visitor an exquisite smile of child-like triumph. A series of light taps, beginning with a sound like a straining of the wood, and then separating into a sharper staccato, was heard at different points in the room, chiefly on the table, and on the valves of the sliding doors. Phillips gave a little nervous start. Ford remained indifferent, but for the slow movement of his eyes in the direction of the young girl, who bent an appealing look on her father. The doctor lifted a hand to invoke attention; the raps died away. "Giorgione, I presume. Will you ask, Egeria?"

She hesitated. Then, in a somewhat tremulous voice, she demanded, "Is it you, Giorgione?" A light shower of raps instantly responded. A thrill of strong excitement visibly passed over the girl, who clutched one hand with the other, and seemed to stay herself by a strong effort of will in her place on the sofa.

"Calmly, my daughter, calmly!" said Dr. Boynton, making a certain restraining gesture towards her. "Yes, it is Giorgione. He can never keep away when colour is

mentioned. Very celebrated for his colouring, I am told, when alive. A Viennese painter, I believe, Mr. Phillips."

"Venetian," answered Phillips, abstractedly. He recalled himself, and added with a forced lightness, "But I don't know that I can advise you to trust the professions of our rapping and tapping friend; there are so few genuine Giorgiones." A brisk volley of taps discharged upon the wall directly behind Phillips's head caused him to turn abruptly and stare hard at the place.

"Oh, you can't *see* it, Phillips," said Ford, with a spare laugh of derision.

"No," said Dr. Boynton, sweetly, "you can't see it. At least, not yet. But if our experiments progress as favourably as they have for the last six months, we may hope before a great while to render the invisible agencies of these sounds as sensible to sight as to hearing. Don't disturb yourself, Mr. Phillips. Mere playfulness, I assure you. They never inflict any real injury." While he spoke the raps renewed themselves here and there upon the woodwork, into the fibre of which they seemed at last to re-enter, and died away in the sort of straining with which they began. "Egeria," said the doctor, turning impressively towards his daughter,

"it seems to me the conditions are uncommonly propitious this afternoon. I think we may look for something of a very remarkable character." He glanced at the clock on the mantel, and confronted his visitors with a smiling face of apology. "Gentlemen, I suppose you came for a séance. My interest in the matter has betrayed me into remarks that have taken up too much of your time."

"I came with the hope of seeing some further proofs of your skill," said Ford; "but if there is anything"—

"Oh, no, no, no! Not at all, not at all!" hastily interrupted the doctor, with a deprecatory wave of his hand. "But—ah—I hardly know how to put it. The fact is, I am anxious for investigation by gentlemen of your intelligence, and I should very much dislike to postpone you— Our landlady, who is a medium of note in her way,—she has lately come to Boston from the West,—had arranged this afternoon for a séance with a number of persons rather more grounded in the belief than yourselves, and"—

The young men rose. "We won't detain you," said Ford. "We can come another time."

"No, no! Wait!" Dr. Boynton waved them to their seats again, which they provisionally resumed, and turned to his daughter. "Egeria, I think I may venture to ask these gentlemen to join our friends?"

"There's no reason why they shouldn't stay, if they like," said the girl, impassively.

"We should be delighted," exclaimed Phillips, "if you'll let us! I'm so little used to ghosts," he said, glancing round at the walls and tables with an apprehensiveness which was perhaps not altogether affected, "that, for my part, I should rather like plenty of company, Miss Boynton,—if Messer Giorgione won't take it amiss."

"Ah, very good!" interposed her father. "Very good indeed. Ha! Why I hesitated was that the sort of experiment to be tried this afternoon requires conditions, concessions, that I thought you might not care to offer, gentlemen. I wish to be perfectly frank with you; what you will see might be produced by trickery, especially in a company of ten or a dozen persons, some of whom could be in collusion with the medium. I pass no judgment upon a certain order of phenomena in their present stage of development, but I make it a rule, myself, measurably to distrust all manifestations occurring in the pre-

sence of more than three persons besides the medium. Still, if you will do us the honour to remain, I can promise you something very curious and interesting, — something novel in the present phase of supernaturalism; nothing less than apparitions, gentlemen, or, as we call them, materialisations. You have heard, perhaps, of these materialisations?"

"Yes," said Ford indifferently, "I have heard of them."

"Mrs. Le Roy—our landlady—has made an eclectic study of the materialisations of several other mediums, and she has succeeded, or claims to have succeeded, not only in reproducing them, but in calling about her many of the principal apparitions who visit the original séances. If you are not familiar with apparitions, you may find it interesting."

"Really, Dr. Boynton," said Phillips, "do you mean that I shall *see* my friend Giorgione performing that sort of tattoo on your wall-paper?"

"Not exactly," urbanely responded Dr. Boynton. "No. It's a curious feature of the manifestations that the audible spirits are never seen, and that those rendered visible by the new development of materialisation are invariably mute. But in a dark séance

to follow the materialisations, my daughter"—

Egeria rose from her place on the sofa and moved toward her father, who, alarmed at some expression of her face, started to his feet to encounter her. She laid her arms with a beseeching gesture on his shoulder. "Father, father! Give it up for to-day, do! I can't go through with it. I am weak—sick; I have no strength left. Everything is gone."

"Why, Egeria! My poor girl! Excuse me, gentlemen; I will be with you in a moment." He cast a sustaining arm about her slim shape, and with the other hand pushed open one of the sliding doors, and disappeared with her from the room beyond.

The men remained in a silence which Ford had apparently no intention of breaking. "Upon the whole," said Phillips, at last, "this is rather painful. Miss Boynton is very much like some other young ladies—for a Pythoness. I should like to see the dark séance,—if I may express myself so inconsequently,—but really I hope the old gentleman will give it up, as she suggested."

"Don't flatter yourself," said Ford, gloomily. "The thing 's just beginning."

"Ford, I don't see how you have the heart to take your attitude towards these people,"

returned the other. "It was shocking to stand on the defensive against the girl, as if she were an impostor. She's a person you might help to scalloped oysters or ice-cream at an evening party, and not expect to talk half so magnificently as she looked. The man believes in himself, and it is your ironical attitude which annuls the honesty in him. That sort of thing kills any amount of genuineness in people."

"Very likely," assented Ford. "He's coming back presently to say that our sphere —attitude, you call it; *his* quackery has a different nomenclature—has annulled his daughter's power over the spirits."

Phillips went up to examine the mantelpiece again. "Well, why not?"

"Certainly, why not? If you grant the one, there's no trouble about granting the other."

"What do you make of what we heard?"

"Nothing."

"You heard it?"

"I hear clatter any time I wake in the night. But I don't attribute it to disembodied spirits on that account."

"Why not?"

"Because there are no disembodied spirits, for one thing."

"Ah, I 'm not so sure of that," said Phillips, with sprightly generosity.

"Really? You doubt everything."

"That 's very well,—but I suppose you mean anything. I prefer to keep an open mind. I don't snub ghosts, for I think I may be one myself, some day."

As he spoke the door-bell rang, and in the interval between the ringing of the bell and the slow response of the servant, Dr. Boynton re-entered, rubbing his hands and smiling. "Sorry to have been obliged to leave you, gentlemen," he said. "You have witnessed, however, one of the most interesting phases of this mystery: mystery I call it, for I 'm as much in the dark about it as yourselves. My daughter felt so deeply the dissenting, the perhaps incredulous, mood—sphere—of one of you that she quite succumbed to it. Don't be alarmed! In an ordinary medium it would be an end of everything for the time being, but she will take part in the séance, all the same, to-day. I have been able to reinforce my daughter's powers by a gift—we will call it a gift—of my own. In former years I looked quite deeply into mesmerism, and I have never quite disused the practice of it, as a branch of my profession,—I am a physician. My wife, who has been dead my

daughter's whole life,"—an expression of pain, curious with reference to the eager brightness of the man's wonted aspect, passed over the speaker's face,—"was a very impressible subject of mine, and in her childhood Egeria was so. Since we have discovered what seems her power as a medium, I have found the mesmeric force—the application of exterior will—of the greatest use in sustaining her against the exhaustion she would otherwise incur from the many conflicting influences she is subject to. I can't regret—I rejoice, in fact—that this phenomenon has occurred as it *has* occurred. It will enable me to present in her to-day the united action of those strange forces, equally occult, the mesmeric and the spiritistic. I have just left my daughter in a complete mesmeric trance, and you will see —you will see"—

He broke off abruptly, and went forward to meet a gentleman and lady, apparently two of the expected guests of Mrs. Le Roy. He greeted them with gay warmth as Mr. and Mrs. Merrifield, and was about to share their acquaintance with Ford and Phillips, when a tall man, with pale blue eyes and a thin growth of faded hair, of a like harshness on crown and chin, interrupted him

with a solemnly proffered hand. "Why, Weatherby," said the doctor, shaking his hand, "I didn't hear you ring."

"I found the girl still at the door, and had no occasion to ring," said Mr. Weatherby.

"Right, right, — quite right!" returned Dr. Boynton. "Glad to see you. Mr. Weatherby, Mr. Ford and Mr. Phillips,— inquirers. Mr. Weatherby is known among us, gentlemen, for powers which he is developing in the direction of levitation." Mr. Weatherby silently shook hands, regarding Phillips and Ford meantime with a remote keenness of glance, and then took a seat in a corner, with an air of established weariness, as if he had found levitation heavy work.

Dr. Boynton continued to receive his guests, and next introduced to the strangers a large, watery-eyed man with a mottled face and reddish hair: "Mr. Eccles,—an inquirer like yourselves, gentlemen, but in a different spirit. Mr. Eccles has no doubt of the nature of the manifestations, but he is investigating the subject with a view— with a view"— Dr. Boynton looked for help to the gentleman whose position he was trying to state, and the latter came to his aid with a vigorous alacrity which was

accented by the lavish display of an upper and lower set of artificial teeth.

"With a view to determine whether something cannot be done to protect us against the assumption by inferior spirits of the identity of the better class of essences. There are doubtless laws of the spirit-life, could we invoke them aright, which would hold these unruly masqueraders in check. I am endeavouring to study the police system —if I may use the expression—of the other world. For I am satisfied that until we have learned to appeal to the proper authorities against these pretenders, we shall get nothing of value from the manifestations. At present it seems to me that in most cases the phenomena are held in contempt by all respectable spirits. This deplorable state of things has resulted, I have no doubt, in great degree from the hostile manner in which investigation of the phenomena has been pursued in the material world."

"Yes," said Ford, "that's an interesting point. My friend here was just speaking of some things of the sort before you came in. He mentioned the disadvantage to the medium of what he called the ironical attitude; he contends that it makes them cheat."

"No doubt, no doubt," replied Mr. Eccles.

"But its effect upon the approximating spiritual sphere is still worse. It drives from that sphere all candid and sober-minded spirits, and none but frivolous triflers remain. Are you a believer in the phenomena, Mr.—ah—Phillips?"

"I am scarcely even a witness of them yet," said Phillips. "But as a mere speculative observer, I don't see why one shouldn't come as worshipfully minded to a séance as to a church."

"Precisely, precisely, sir," assented Mr. Eccles. "And yet I cannot say that a séance is exactly a religious service. No, it partakes rather of a dual nature. It will doubtless be elevated in character, as the retro- and interacting influences improve. But at present it is a sort of informal reception at which friends from both worlds meet and commingle in social intercourse; in short, a kind of bi-mundane—bi-mundane"—

"Kettle-drum," suggested Ford.

"Ah!" breathed Mr. Eccles. He folded his arms, and set his artificial teeth to smile displeasure upon Ford's impassible face. Anything that he may have been going to say further was cut short by the approach of a gentleman, at sight of whom his smile relaxed nothing of its displeasure.

"Hello! How do, Eccles?" said the newcomer, gaily. He was a short and slight man, and he planted himself in front of Mr. Eccles upon his very small, squarely stepping feet. Whatever may have been the temperament of the invisible presences, those in the flesh were, with the exception of this gentleman, not at all lively: they were, in fact, of serious countenance and low spirits; and they were evidently glad of this co-religionist who could take their common belief so cheerfully. He had come in the last, and he had been passing a light word with this one and that, before saluting Mr. Eccles, who alone seemed not glad to see him. He was dressed in a smart business suit, whose fashionableness was as much at variance with the prevailing dress of the company as his gaiety with its prevailing solemnity.

"How are you?" he said, looking up into Mr. Eccles's dental smile. "Going to get after those scamps again? Well, I'm glad of it. Behaved shamefully at Mrs. Merrifield's, the other night; knocked the chairs over and flung the flowers about,—ridiculous! If they can't manage better than that, a man might as well go to a democratic ward meeting when he dies. Ah, doctor!"

Dr. Boynton approached from the other

room, which had been closed, and on which he again shut the rolling doors. "Mr. Hatch!" said the doctor radiantly, while he pressed the other's hand in both his own, and made a rose-bud of his mouth. "You just complete our list. Glad to see you."

"Thanks, much!" said Mr. Hatch. "Where's Miss Egeria?"

"In a moment," replied the doctor mysteriously. Then he turned to the company, and said in a formal tone, "As we are all here now, friends, we won't delay any further." He advanced and flung open the doors to the back parlour, discovering, in the middle of the room, a common extending dining-table, draped merely with so much of a striped turkey-red supper-cloth as would fall over the edge and partly conceal the legs. The top of the table was pierced by a hole some ten or twelve inches square, and over this hole was set a box, open on one side, and lined with black velvet; a single gas jet burned at a half-light overhead.

"Now, if you will take seats, ladies and gentlemen!" said Dr. Boynton. "Mrs. Merrifield, will you sit on my right, so as to be next my daughter? And Mr. Phillips on my left, here? And you, Mr. Ford, on Miss Smiley's left, next to Mr. Eccles? Mr.

Hatch, take your place between those two ladies"—

"I 'm there, doctor, every time," said Mr. Hatch, promptly obeying.

"I must protest at the outset, Dr. Boynton," began Mr. Eccles, "against this sort of"—

"Beg pardon. You 're right, Eccles," said Hatch; "I won't do it any more. But when I get down at a table like this, I feel gay, and I can't help running over a little. But no spilling 's the word now. Do we join hands, doctor, *comme à l'ordinaire?*"

"Yes, all join hands, please," answered the doctor.

"Well, I want these ladies to promise not to squeeze my hands, either of them," said Hatch. The ladies laughed, and Mr. Eccles, relinquishing the hands of the persons next him, made a movement to rise, in which he was met by an imploring downward wave of Dr. Boynton's hand.

"Please, Mr. Eccles, remain. Mr. Hatch, I may trust your kindness? Miss Merrill, will you sing—ah—something?"

A small, cheerful lady, on the sunny side of thirty, with a pair of spectacles gleaming on her amiable nose, responded to this last

appeal. "I think we had better all sing, doctor."

"I have a theory in wishing you to sing alone," said the doctor.

"Oh, very well!" Miss Merrill acquiesced. "Have you any preference?"

"No. Anything devotional."

"'Maiden's Prayer,' Miss Merrill," suggested Hatch.

This overcast Mr. Eccles again, but Miss Merrill took the fun in good part, and laughed.

"I don't believe you know anything about devotional music, Mr. Hatch," she said.

"That's so. My *répertoire* is out already," owned Hatch.

Miss Merrill raised her spectacles thoughtfully to the ceiling, and after a moment began to sing "Flee as a Bird to your Mountain," in a sweet contralto. As the thrilling tones filled the room all other sounds were quelled; the circle at the table became motionlessly silent, and the long sighing breath of the listeners alone made itself heard in the pauses of the singing. Before the words died away, a draught of cold air struck across the room, and through the door at the head of the table, which unclosed mysteriously, as if blown open by the wind, a figure in white

was seen in the passage without. It drifted nearer, and with a pale green scarf over her shoulders Egeria softly and waveringly entered the room. Her face was white, and her eyes had the still, sightless look of those who walk in their sleep. She advanced, and sank into the chair between her father and Mrs. Merrifield, and at the same moment that groaning and straining sound was heard, as if in the fibres of the wood; and then the sounds grew sharper and more distinct, and a continuous rapping seemed to cover the whole surface of the table, with a noise like that of heavy clots of snow driving against a window pane.

As Egeria took the chair left vacant for her, it could be seen that another had also found a place in the circle. This was a very large, dark woman of some fifty years, who silently saluted some of the company, half withdrawing from their sight as she sat down next to Mrs. Merrifield, behind the box.

Egeria remained staring blankly before her for a moment. Then she said in a weary voice, "They are here."

"Who are, my daughter?" demanded her father.

In a long sigh, "Legion," she responded.

"We may thank Mr. Hatch for the company we are in," Mr. Eccles broke out resentfully. "I have protested—"

"Patience,—a little patience, Mr. Eccles!" implored Dr. Boynton. Then, without changing his polite tone, "Look again, Egeria," he said. "Are they all evil?"

"Their name is legion," wearily answered the girl, as before.

"Yes, yes, Egeria. They always come at first. But is there no hope of help against them? Look again,—look carefully."

"The innumerable host"—

"I knew it,—I knew it!" exulted the doctor.

"Disperses them," said the girl, and lapsed into a silence which she did not break again.

At a sign from the large woman, who proved to be Mrs. Le Roy, Dr. Boynton said, "Will you sing again, Miss Merrill?"

Miss Merrill repeated the closing stanza of the hymn she had already sung.

While she sang, flitting gleams of white began to relieve themselves against the black interior of the box. They seemed to gather shape and substance; as the singing ceased, the little hand of a child moved slowly back and forth in the gloom.

A moan broke from one of the women. "Oh, I hope it 's for me!" she quavered.

They began, one after another, to ask, "Is it for me?" the hand continuing to wave softly to and fro. When it came the turn of this woman, the hand was violently agitated; she burst into tears. "It 's my Lily, my darling little Lily."

The apparition beckoned to the speaker.

"You can touch it," said the doctor.

The woman bent over the table, and thrust her hand into the box; the apparition melted away; a single fragrant tuberose was flung upon the table. "Oh, oh!" sobbed the woman. "My Lily's favourite flower! She always liked snowdrops above everything, because they came the first thing in the spring. Oh, to think she can come to me,—to *know* that she is living yet, and can never die! I 'm sure I felt her little hand an instant,—so smooth and soft, so cold!"

"They always seem to be cold," philosophised Boynton. "A more exquisite vitality coming in contact with our own would naturally give the sensation of cold. But you must sit down now, Mrs. Blodgett," added the doctor, kindly. "Look! There is another hand."

A large wrinkled hand, like that of an

elderly woman, crept tremulously through the opening of the box, sank, and then creeping upward again laid its fingers out over the edge of the opening. No one recognised it, and it would have won no general acclaim if Mrs. Merrifield had not called attention to the lace which encircled the wrist; she caught a bit of this between her thumb and finger, and detained it a moment while the other ladies bent over and examined it. There was but one voice; it was real lace.

One hand after another now appeared in the box, some of them finding a difficulty in making their way up through the aperture, which had been formed by cutting across in the figure of an X the black cloth which had lined the bottom of the box, and which now hung down in triangular flaps. The slow and feeble effort of the apparitions to free themselves from these dangling pieces of cloth heightened their effectiveness. From time to time a hand violently responded to the demand from one of the circle, "Is it for me?" and several persons were allowed to place their hands in the box and touch the materialisations. These persons testified that they felt a distinct pressure from the spectral hands.

"Would you like to try, Mr. Phillips?" politely asked the doctor.

"Thanks, yes," said Phillips, after a hesitation. He put his hand into the box: the apparitional hand, apparently that of a young girl, dealt him a flying touch, and vanished. Phillips nervously withdrew his hand.

"Did you feel it?" inquired Dr. Boynton.

"Yes," answered Phillips.

"Oh, what was it like? Wasn't it smooth and soft and cold?" demanded the mother of the first apparition.

"Yes," said Phillips; "it was a sensation like the touch of a kid glove."

"Oh, of course, of course!" Mr. Eccles burst out, in a sort of scornful groan. "A stuffed glove! If we are to approach the investigation in this spirit"—

"I beg your pardon?" said Phillips, inquiringly.

"I'm sure," interposed Dr. Boynton, "that Mr. Phillips, whom I have had the honour of introducing to this circle, has intended nothing but a *bona fide* description of the sensation he experienced."

"I don't understand," said Phillips.

"You were not aware, then," pursued the doctor, "that there have been attempts to

impugn the character of these and similar materialisations,—in fact, to prove that these hands are merely stuffed gloves, mechanically operated?"

"Not at all!" cried Phillips.

"I was certain of your good feeling, your delicacy," said the doctor. "We will go on, friends."

But the apparitions had apparently ceased, while the raps, which had been keeping up a sort of desultory, telegraphic tattoo throughout, when not actively in use as a means of conversation with the disembodied presences, suddenly seemed to cover the whole surface of the table with their detonation.

"The materialisations are over," said Mrs. Le Roy, speaking for the first time. Her voice, small and thin, oddly contrasted with her physical bulk.

"Oh, pshaw, Mrs. Le Roy!" protested Hatch, "don't give it up that way. Come! I want Jim. Ladies, join me in loud cries for Jim."

Several of the ladies beset Mrs. Le Roy, who at last yielded so far as to ask if Jim were present. A sharp affirmative rap responded, and after an interval, during which the spectators peered anxiously into the dark box, a sort of dull fumbling was heard, and

another materialisation was evidently in progress.

"You can't see the hand of a gentleman of Jim's complexion against that black cloth," said Hatch, rising. "Lend me your handkerchiefs, ladies. James has a salt and sullen rheum offends him."

Several ladies made haste to offer their handkerchiefs, and, leaning over, Hatch draped them about the bottom of the box. The flaps were again agitated, and a large black hand showed itself distinctly against the white ground formed by the handkerchiefs. It was hailed with a burst of ecstasy from all those who seemed to be frequenters of these séances, and it wagged an awkward salutation to the company.

"Good for you, good for you, James!" said Hatch, approvingly. "Rings? Wish to adorn your person, James?" he continued. The hand gesticulated an imaginable assent to this proposal, and Hatch gravely said, "Your rings, ladies." A half dozen were passed to him, and he contrived, with some trouble, to slip them on the fingers of the hand, which continually moved itself, in spite of many caressing demands from the ladies (with whom Jim was apparently a favourite spectre) that he would hold still,

and Hatch's repeated admonition that he should moderate his transports. When the rings were all in place, the hand was still dissatisfied, as it seemed, and beckoned toward Egeria. "Want Miss Boynton's ring?" asked Hatch.

The girl gave a start, involuntarily laying hold of the ring, and Dr. Boynton said instantly, "He cannot have it. The ring was her mother's." This drew general attention to Miss Boynton's ring: it was what is called a marchioness ring, and was set with a long black stone, sharply pointed at either end.

"All right; beg pardon, doctor," said Hatch, respectfully; but the hand, after a moment's hesitation, sank through the aperture, as if in dudgeon, and was heard knocking off the rings against the table underneath. This seemed a climax for which the familiars of the house had been waiting. The ladies who had lent their rings to Mr. Hatch, and had joined their coaxing voices to his in entreating the black hand to be quiet, now rose with a rustle of drapery, and joyously cackled satisfaction in Jim's characteristic behaviour.

"That is the last," Mrs. Le Roy announced, and withdrew. Some one turned on the

light, and Hatch began to pick up the rings under the table; this was the occasion of renewed delight in Jim on the part of the ladies to whom Hatch restored their property.

"Would you like to look under the table?" asked Dr. Boynton of Ford, politely lifting the cloth and throwing it back.

"I don't care to look," said Ford, remaining seated, and keeping the same impassive face with which he had witnessed all the shows of the séance.

Dr. Boynton directed a glance of invitation at Phillips, who stooped and peered curiously at the under side of the table, and then passed his hand over the carpet beneath the aperture. "No signs of a trap?" suggested the doctor.

"No, quite solid," said Phillips.

"These things are evidently merely in their inception," remarked the doctor, candidly. "I wouldn't advise their implicit acceptation under all circumstances, but here the conditions strike me as simple and really very fair."

"I've been very greatly interested indeed," said Phillips, "and I shouldn't at all attempt to explain what I've seen."

"We shall now try our own experiment,"

said the doctor, looking round at the windows, through the blinds and curtains of which the early twilight was stealing. "Mr. Hatch, will you put up the battening?" While Hatch made haste to darken the windows completely with some light wooden sheathings prepared for the purpose, Dr. Boynton included Ford also in his explanation. "What we are about to do requires the exclusion of all light. These intelligences, whatever they are, that visit us seem peculiarly sensitive to certain qualities of light; they sometimes endure candles pretty well, but they dislike gas even more than daylight, and we shall shut that off entirely. Yes, my dear," he said, turning lightly toward his daughter, who, apparently relieved from the spell under which she had sat throughout the séance, now approached him, and addressed him some entreaty in a low tone, to which the anxiety of her serious face gave its effect. Ford watched them narrowly while they spoke together; she evidently beseeching, and her father urging with a sort of obdurate kindness, from which she turned at last in despair, and sat listlessly down again in her place. One might have interpreted the substance of their difference as light or weighty, but there could be no

doubt of its result in the girl's reluctant obedience. She sat with her long hands in her lap and her eyes downcast, while the young man bent his glance upon her with a somewhat softened curiosity. Phillips drew up a chair beside her, and began to address her some evening-party conversation, to which, after her first terrified start at the sound of his voice, she listened with a look of dull mystification, and a vague and monosyllabic comment. He was in the midst of this difficult part when Dr. Boynton announced that the preparations were now perfect, and invited the company to seat themselves in a circle around his daughter, from whose side Phillips was necessarily driven. Mrs. Le Roy re-entered, and after a survey of the forming circle took her place with the rest. Dr. Boynton instantly shut off the gas, and several of the circle, led by Miss Merrill, began to sing. It was music in a minor key, and as the sound of it fell the air was suddenly filled with noises of a heterogeneous variety. Voices whispered here and there, overhead and, as it appeared, underfoot; a fan was caught up, and each person in the circle was swiftly and violently fanned; a music-box, placed on Phillips's knee, was wound up, and then set floating,

as it seemed, through the air ; rings were snatched from some fingers and roughly thrust upon others, amidst the cries and nervous laughter of the women.

Through all, the mystical voices continued, and now they began to be recognised by different persons in the circle. The mother of one briefly visited him, and exhorted him to have faith in a life to come ; the little sister of another revealed that she could never tell the beauty of the spirit-land ; a lady cried out, "Oh, John, is that you kissing me?" to which a hollow whisper answered, "Yes; persevere, and all will be well." Suddenly a sharp smack was heard, and another lady, whose chubbiness had no doubt commended her as a medium for this sort of communication, exclaimed, with a hysterical laugh, "Oh, here's Jim, again! He's slapping me on the shoulder!" and in another instant this frolic ghost had passed round the circle, slapping shoulders and knees in the absolute darkness with amazing precision.

Jim went as suddenly as he came, and then there was a lull in the demonstrations. They began again with the voices, amidst which was heard the rhythmic clapping of hands, as Egeria beat her palms together, to prove that she had no material agency in the

feats performed. Then, one of the circle called out, "Oh, delicious! Somebody is pressing a perfumed handkerchief to my face!" "And mine!" "And mine!" came quickly from others.

"Be careful," warned the small voice of Mrs. Le Roy, "not to break the circle now, or some one will get hurt."

She had scarcely spoken, when there came a shriek of pain and terror, with the muffled noise of a struggle; then a fainter cry, and a fall to the floor.

All sprang to their feet in confusion.

"Egeria! Egeria!" shouted Dr. Boynton. The girl made no answer. "Oh, light the gas, light the gas!" he entreated; and now the crowning wonder of the séance appeared. A hand of bluish flame shone in the air, and was seen to hover near one of the gas-burners, which it touched; as the gas flashed up and the hand vanished, a groan of admiration burst forth, which was hardly checked by the spectacle that the strong light revealed.

Egeria lay stretched along the floor in a swoon, the masses of her yellow hair disordered and tossed about her pale face. Her arms were flung outward, and the hand on which she wore her ring showed a stain of blood, oozing from a cut in a finger next the

ring; the hand must have been caught in a savage clutch, and the sharp point of the setting crushed into the tender flesh.

Ford was already on his knees beside the girl, over whose insensible face he bowed himself to lift her fallen head.

"I told you," said Mrs. Le Roy, "that some one would get hurt if anybody broke the circle."

"It has been a glorious time!" cried Dr. Boynton, with sparkling eyes, while he went about shaking hands with one and another. "It has surpassed my utmost hopes! We stand upon the verge of a great era! The whole history of supernaturalism shows nothing like it! The key to the mystery is found!"

The company thronged eagerly about him, some to ask what the key was, others to talk of the wonderful hand. Egeria was forgotten; she might have been trodden under foot but for the active efforts of Hatch, who cleared a circle about her, and at last managed to withdraw the doctor from his auditors and secure his attention for the young girl.

"Oh, a faint, a mere faint," he said, as he bent over her and touched her pulse. "The facts established are richly worth all

they have cost. Ah!" he added, "we must have air to revive her."

"You won't get it in *this* crowd!" said Hatch, looking savagely round.

"We had better carry her to her room," said Mrs. Le Roy.

"Yes, yes; very good, very good!" cried the doctor, absently trying to gather the languid shape into his arms. He presently desisted, and turned again to the group which Hatch had forced aside, and began to talk of the luminous hand and its points of difference from the hands shown in the box.

Hatch glanced round after him in despair, and then, with a look at Ford, said, "*We* must manage it somehow." He bent over the inanimate girl, and with consummate reverence and delicacy drew her into his arms, and made some steps toward the door.

"It won't do; you're too little, Mr. Hatch," said Mrs. Le Roy, with brutal common sense. "You never could carry her up them stairs in the world. Give her to the other gentleman, and go and fetch Dr. Boynton, if you can ever get him away."

Hatch hesitated a moment, and with another look at Ford surrendered his burden to him. Ford received it as reverently as the other had given it; the beautiful face

lay white upon his shoulder; the long, bright, disheveled hair fell over his arm; in his strong clasp he lifted her as lightly as if she had been indeed some pale phantom.

Phillips, standing aloof from the other group and intent upon this tableau, was able to describe it very effectively, a few evenings afterwards, to a lady who knew both himself and Ford well enough to enjoy it.

## II.

MR. PHILLIPS'S father had been in business on that obscure line which divides the wholesale merchant's social acceptability from the lost condition of the retail dealer. When he died, however, his son emerged for ever from the social twilight in which the father had been content to remain. He took account of his means, and found that he had enough to live handsomely upon, not only without anything like shop-keeping, but without business of any sort, and he courageously resolved to be a man of leisure. He had certain tastes which qualified him for this life; he had read much, and he had travelled abroad. He joined a club convenient to the lodging which he kept in his paternal home, letting out the rest of the house to a thrifty woman whose interest it was that he should have nothing to complain of. Every morning, at nine precisely, he breakfasted at the club, beside one of the pleasantest windows; the sun came in there

in the afternoon, and except in the winter months he dined at another table. His breakfast and his dinner were the chief events of a day which he had the wisdom to keep as like every other day as he could, unless for some very good reason. When he had finished either meal, he turned over the newspapers and magazines, largely English, in the reading-room; after dinner he often dozed a few minutes in his chair. For the rest, he paid visits and went about to the picture stores and to the studios. Now and then he bought a painting, which in his hands turned out a good investment; but his passion was bric-à-brac, and he liked the excitement of the auction-room, where he picked up from time to time a rug, a queer vase, a colonial clock, a claw-footed table or chest of drawers, and added them to his stores.

He kept up with the current literature, and distilled from it a polite essence, with which he knew how to perfume his conversation in the measure agreeable to ladies willing to learn what it was distinguished to read. With many he was an authority in such matters, and with nearly all he was acceptable for a certain freshness of the susceptibilities, which he studiously pre-

served, growing them under glass, as it were, when it was past their natural seasons to flourish in the open air. Now and then one revolted against this artificial bloom, and declared that Mr. Phillips's emotions smelt of the watering-pot; but commonly they were well liked by the sex with which, even if he had not preferred, he would have been forced mainly to associate. There is no society but that of women for an idler in our country; the other men are busy and tired, with little patience and little sympathy for men who are not busy and tired.

Such men as Phillips consorted with were of the feminine temperament, like artists and musicians (he had a pretty taste in music); or else they were of the intensely masculine sort, like Ford, to whom he had attached himself. He liked to have their queer intimacy noted, and to talk of it with the ladies of his circle, finding it as much of a mystery as he could. At these times he treated his friend as a bit of *vertu*, telling, at what length his lovely listener would, of how he had happened to pick Ford up. He bore much from him in the way of contemptuous sarcasm; it illustrated the strange fascination which such a man as Ford had for such a man as Phillips. He lay in wait for his

friend's characteristics, and when he had surprised this trait or that in him he was fond of exhibiting his capture.

The tie that bound Ford, on his part, to Phillips was not tangible; it was hardly more than force of habit, or like an indifferent yielding to the advances made by the latter. Doubtless the absence of any other intimacy had much to do with this apparent intimacy. They had as little in common in matters of taste as in temperament. Ford openly scorned bric-à-brac; he rarely went into society; for the ladies in whose company Phillips liked to bask he cared as slightly as for stamped leather or Saracenic tiles. He was not of Bostonian origin, and had come to the city a much younger man than we find him. He was known to a few persons of like tastes for his scientific studies, which he pursued somewhat fitfully, as his poverty, and that dark industry known as writing for the press, by which he eked out his poverty, permitted. He wrote a caustic style; and this, together with his brooding look and his taciturn and evasive habits, gave rise to conjecture that his past life concealed a disappointment in love, "Or perhaps," suggested a fair analyst, "in literature."

Several mornings after the séance at Mrs. Le Roy's, he sat on one of the many benches which the time found vacant in the Public Garden. It was yet far too early for the nurse-maids and their charges and suitors; the marble Venus of the fountain was surprised without her shower on; Mr. Ball's equestrian Washington drew his sword in solitude unbroken by a policeman upon Dr. Rimmer's Hamilton in Commonwealth Avenue; the whole precinct rested in patrician insensibility to the plebeian hour of seven; and Ford, if he had cared, would have been safe from the polite amaze of that neighbourhood at finding one even of its remote acquaintance in those pleasure-grounds at that period of the day. He sat in a place which was habitual with him; for he lodged in one of the boarding-houses on a street near by, and he made the Public Garden the resort of such leisure as each day afforded him, seeking always the same seat under the same Kilmarnock willow, and suffering a sense of invasion when he found it taken. Commonly his leisure fell much later in the day; and he had now the aspect of a sleep-broken man, rather than the early riser who takes the air on principle or from choice. He sat and gazed absently over at

the pond, where the swans lay still on the still water, with their white reflections under them as distinct and substantial to the eye as their own bulk.

A few stragglers, looking as jaded as himself for the most part, lounged on the seats along the walks, or hung listless on the parapet of the bridge. The spiteful English sparrows scattered their sharp, irritating notes through the air, and quarrelled about over the grass, or made love like the nagging lovers out of a lady's novel.

When Ford at last withdrew his absent eyes from the swans and looked up, he was aware of a large and flabby presence, which towered, in the sense that a lofty mould of jelly may be said to tower, on the path directly before him. In this he gradually recognised an acquaintance of the spiritual séance, and finally knew the mottled face of Mr. Eccles; the morning was unseasonably close and warm; his hat was off, and the breeze played with the hair that crept thinly over his crown; his shirt and collar were clean, but affected the spectator differently.

"A-r-r-h—good-morning!" he said, with a slow, hard smoothness, staring intently at Ford, with a set smile and shut teeth.

"How d' ye do!" answered Ford, without interest.

"Nice morning," said Mr. Eccles, turning half about, and describing it with a wave of his limprimmed silk hat.

"Very pleasant," assented Ford, making no motion to rise, and neither inviting nor forbidding further conversation.

"A habitual early riser?" suggested Mr. Eccles.

"No, I merely happen to be up."

"I rise early myself," said Mr. Eccles. "It is my digestion. I sleep badly." He looked, as he spoke, like a man who had never slept well. "Your friend, I presume, is not troubled in his digestion?"

"If you mean Mr. Phillips," replied Ford, with a cold ray of amusement, "I believe not. He makes it a matter of conscience to digest well."

"It isn't that, sir," said Mr. Eccles. "I have experimented in the matter a great deal. I have tried to digest well on principle, but that does not reach the root of the trouble. It may be alleviated by the proper influences; but this sourness"—he struck his stomach softly — "seems to be the material response to some spiritual ferment which we are at present powerless to escape.

I am satisfied that the large majority of our indigestion, sir, comes from the existing imperfections of mediumisation."

"Some philosophers attribute it to pie," said Ford, neutrally.

"That is a very superficial way of looking at it," returned Mr. Eccles. "If we could once establish the true relations with the other life, *pie* wouldn't stand in our way."

"I 've no doubt that those who establish their relations in the old-fashioned way, by dying, are not troubled by pie," said Ford.

"Oh, death is not necessary to a complete rapport," returned Mr. Eccles, somewhat impatiently. "I have long been satisfied of that. It may even prove an obstacle. What we want is to place ourselves in connection with the regions of order and peace. Till we can do this, we must feel the effects of the acidity, as I may call it, which characterises the crude and unsettled spiritual existence reached by our present system of mediumisation. We had an illustration of that the other night, sir, in the vulgar violence of the manifestations. I was ashamed that any person of refinement should have been invited to witness such a—a saturnalia. I should have withdrawn from the circle myself, at once, as soon as I perceived what

the character of the communications was likely to be, if it had not been for my regard for Dr. Boynton and his daughter. There is no doubt in my mind, sir, that if we had then been in communication with ladies and gentlemen of the other life, the circle could have been broken with impunity. As it was, you saw the brutality with which the violation of a single condition was resented by the savage crew we had suffered to be called about us. They dreaded to lose an opportunity for riot. The consequence was that Miss Boynton's hand was caught and crushed till the setting of her ring cut to the bone; then she was flung to the ground. The only redeeming feature, the only hopeful aspect, of the affair was the apparition which terminated the disgraceful scene. Undoubtedly the hand which turned on the gas was a celestial agency of the highest and purest type."

Ford let his gaze, which had been dwelling upon Mr. Eccles's face with cold scrutiny, drop to the ground. "I hope," he said, "that Miss Boynton has quite recovered from her—accident."

"It was a shock," returned Mr. Eccles, candidly, "and her physique is delicate. She is a mingling of the finest elements, but

the proportions are so adjusted that the equilibrium is very easily disturbed. *Her* digestion, I should say, was normally very good. She is evidently in relation, for the most part, with settled and orderly essences." He again set his teeth, and shone upon Ford with a wide, joyless smile. He waited for a moment, and Ford making no sign of interest, he said, "Good-morning," and towered tremulously away, carrying his hat in his hand, and letting his baldness take the breeze as he walked.

When he was gone, Ford sat in a long reverie, from which he was roused by the clock of the Arlington Street church striking eight, which was his breakfast hour. He rose, and strolled down the path and across the street to his lodging, which he entered with his latch-key. The other boarders, with their morning freshness of toilet upon them, were lounging or tripping down-stairs to breakfast, and met him with various degrees of interest, umbrage, and indifference in their salutation as he went up. The men mostly growled at him, with settled dislike in their tones; some of the women beheld him with pique, others with kindly curiosity; one little lady, in a pretty morning-robe, warbled at him, as she swept her skirts

aside to make room for him at the turn of the stairs, "Doing the early bird, Mr. Ford?"

"No; the early worm," he returned with as little effusion as he had lavished upon Mr. Eccles

The lady gave him the slant of a laughing face, turned up at him, as she tripped down the stairs. "Don't disagree with the bird!" she said saucily. She had achieved celebrity among the other ladies by not being afraid of him.

He seemed not to think any answer necessary, and passed up two more flights to his room, which was small and in the rear of the house. It was cheerlessly furnished with a tumbled bed and two or three chairs and a large table, on which many papers and books, arranged in scrupulously neat order, left a small vacant space at one corner for writing, where some sheets of fresh manuscript lay. On the window seat were some chemical materials and apparatus; on the chimney-shelf some faded photographs; a tobacco-pouch and pipes. Ford's business was with the manuscript leaves, which he took up and tore carefully into small pieces. He flung these into the grate, and then, with a conscious air, lifted one of the pipes, and fingered it a moment before he turned to leave the

room. It was as if he had not liked the witness of his wonted environment of this act of his. He went on, down to breakfast, and took his place at a table as yet but sparsely tenanted. The lively lady of the stairs-landing was there; she sat long at meat, morning, noon, and night, not for the material, but for the mental refreshment; for she found that more people could be made to give some account of themselves there than anywhere else. She was sipping her coffee out of her spoon, and looking about her between sips, with a disengaged air, when Ford came in, and she fastened upon him over a good stretch of table, at once.

"Perhaps you went out so early in order to see a ghost, Mr. Ford?"

"Very likely," answered Ford, making a listless decision between the steak and the bacon.

"And did you?"

"What?"

"See one?"

"They always charge people not to say."

"Ah, not now-a-days! They want you to go and tell all about it. That 's what I understand from Mr. Phillips." She sank back a little into herself, with her eyes rest-

ing quietly upon Ford's inattentive face, and her elbow brought gracefully to her side, and softly stirred her coffee. She was not of the society in which Mr. Phillips ordinarily moved, but was one of the interesting people on its borders whom his leisure allowed him to cultivate. She thus became in some sort of his world,—enough at least to know what was going on in it, and to be referred to there as Mr. Phillips's bright little friend, by ladies who did not like her. She waited for Ford to speak in response to her last remark; but he was not one of those men who rush like air into any empty place; he had the gift of reticence, and the lady who had planned the vacuum beheld his self-control with admiration. It piqued her to fresh effort; she believed that his speaking was only a question of time. "Mr. Phillips," she went on, beginning to sip her coffee again, "gave me quite a glowing description of the Pythoness, as he called her; quite a Medea-like beauty, I should judge,—if it was her own hair."

"Mr. Phillips has a very catholic taste in female loveliness," said Ford.

"But really, now, Mr. Ford," said the lady, in a tone of alluring candour, "weren't you very much frightened?"

"I am constitutionally timid."

The lady laughed. "Then you were! What *did* you make of it all, Mr. Ford? What *do* you suppose made the cut in her hand? Don't you think she made it herself? You know Mr. Phillips likes mystery, and he wouldn't offer the least suggestion."

"Then I don't think it would be wise in me to hazard a guess. I don't see Mr. Perham this morning," said Ford, lifting his eyes for the first time, and lazily looking at the vacant places about the lady.

She visibly honoured him for this demonstration upon her weak point. She was a good-natured creature, and she liked skilful manœuvring, especially in men, where it had the piquancy of a surprise. "Oh, no!" she smiled. "Poor Mr. Perham is not equal to these early breakfasts. If you were often down yourself, Mr. Ford, you would have noticed his absence before this. He lets me come down on condition that I bring him his modest chop with my own hand, when I come up. You have no idea what a truly amiable invalid is till you know Mr. Perham well."

Ford expressed no concern for the intimate character of Mr. Perham, and after some further toying with her spoon Mrs. Perham

slipped back to her point of attack: "I don't know but I ought to make my excuses for trying to provoke you to talk of the matter."

"I don't mind your trying. But I should have been vexed if you had succeeded."

"Yes, that would have been a dead loss of material. I suppose you intend to write about it."

A flush passed over Ford's face, which Mrs. Perham gleefully noted. He replied, a little off his balance, that he had no intention of writing of it.

"Oh, then, you *have* written!" joyed Mrs. Perham.

Ford did not answer, but put his napkin into his ring, and rose from his chair, quitting the room with a faintly visible inclination toward the end of the table at which Mrs. Perham sat.

"Mrs. Perham, I don't see how you can bear to speak to that man," said one of the ladies.

"His manners are odious!" cried another.

"Oh, he *has* manners then—of some sort?" inquired a third. "I hadn't observed."

"My dears," said Mrs. Perham, "he's charming! He is as natural as the noble savage, and twice as handsome. I like those

men who *show* their contempt of you. At least, they're not hypocrites. And Mr. Ford's insolence has a sort of cold thrill about it that's delicious. Few men can retreat with dignity. He was routed, just now, but he went off like see the conquering hero."

"He skulked off," said one of the unpersuaded.

"Skulked? Did he really skulk?" demanded Mrs. Perham. "I *wish* I could believe I had made him skulk. Mary, have you Mr. Perham's chop ready? I'll take it up,—I said I took it."

Mrs. Perham laughed, and disappeared with her little tray, like a conjugal *Chocolatière*, and the ladies continued for a decent space to talk about Ford. Then they began to talk about her.

## III.

FORD went back to his room, and turned over some new books which he had on his table for review. He could not make his choice among these volumes, or else he found them all unworthy; for after an absent glance at the deep chair in which he usually sat to read, he looked up his hat and went out, taking his way toward the shabbily adventurous street where the Boyntons had their lodgings.

Dr. Boynton met him at the door of his apartment with a smile of cheerful cordiality; but when Ford mentioned his encounter with Mr. Eccles, and expressed his hope that Miss Boynton was better, "Well, no," answered the doctor, "I cannot say that she is. She has had a shock,—a shock from which she may be days and even weeks in recovering." He rubbed his small, soft hands together, and beamed upon Ford's cold front almost rapturously.

"I am very sorry to hear it," said the latter, with a glance of misgiving.

"Yes, yes," admitted the other. "In some respects it is regrettable. But there are in this case, as in all others, countervailing advantages." He settled himself comfortably in the corner of the sofa as he proceeded. "Yes. The whole episode, on its scientific side, has been eminently satisfactory. The character of the manifestations at the séance, the violence with which neglect of the conditions was resented, the subsequent effects, primary and secondary, on the nervous organism of the medium, and indeed of almost all persons present, have been singularly impressive, and indicative of novel and momentous developments. I don't know, Mr. Ford, whether you have had an opportunity of conversing with any of our friends, since the evening in question, but I have seen many of them, and they have all testified to an experience which, however difficult of formulation, was most distinct. It appears to have been something analogous to the electrisation of persons in the vicinity of a point struck by lightning. In the case of Mrs. Le Roy there has scarcely been a cessation of the effects. The raps in her room have been almost continuous, and the furni-

ture of the whole house has been affected. Miss Boynton has suffered the greatest distress from the continuance of the manifestations, and her mind is oppressed by influences which she is apparently powerless to throw off. In a word, everything has worked most harmoniously to the best advantage, and the progress made has been all that we could wish. Mr. Eccles perhaps told you of a marked increase of the discomfort he habitually suffers from indigestion?"

Ford hardly knew whether to laugh or rage at all this, but he merely said that Mr. Eccles had mentioned his dyspepsia, and remained in a bitter indecision, while Dr. Boynton went on. "Ah, yes! yes, yes! I think we may safely refer the aggravation of his complaint to the influences, still active, of our memorable séance. But I am not sure that Mr. Eccles's peculiar theory is the correct one. I distrust his speculations in some degree. A ferment of the kind he speaks of in the world of spirits would be more apt to ultimate itself here in the mind than in the stomach."

"Do you generally distrust speculations in regard to these matters?" asked Ford.

"I distrust *all* special speculation," said

the doctor. "We physicians know what specialism leads to in medicine. I prefer to base my convictions solely upon facts."

"Are you able to satisfy yourself as to the facts of the séance here the other night?"

"Not absolutely,—no. Not entirely. As yet we are only able to approximate facts."

"Then as yet you have only approximated convictions?" asked Ford.

"As yet I am only inquiring," said the doctor, with sweet acquiescence. "Startling and significant as those manifestations were, I feel that I am still only an inquirer. But I feel also that I have gained certain points which will almost infallibly lead me to a final conclusion in the matter."

"Then you mean to say," pursued Ford, "that as a man of science you rose from Mrs. Le Roy's experiments in sleight of hand, the other night, with a degree of satisfaction. Have you the slightest confidence in her powers?"

"Why, there," replied Boynton, "you touch upon a strange problem. I am always aware, in these matters, of an obscurity of motive and of opinion which will not allow me to make any explicit answer to such a question as yours."

"You obfuscate yourself before sitting

down, as you darken the room, that you may be in a perfectly receptive condition?"

"Something of that nature,—yes. But I should distinguish: I should say that the obfuscation, though voluntary, was very largely unconscious."

Ford laughed. "I am afraid that I was in no state to judge of the exhibition then. You are a man of such candour yourself that I am sure you will not blame my frankness in telling you that I thought the whole apparitional performance a piece of gross trickery."

"Not at all, not at all!" cried Boynton, with friendly animation. "From one point your position is perfectly tenable,—perfectly. You will remember that I myself warned you of the possibility of deceit in the effects produced, and said that I always took part in such a séance with the full knowledge of this possibility. At the same time, I always try, for my own sake, and for the sake of the higher truth to be attained, to keep this knowledge in abeyance,—in the dark, as we were saying."

"I see," said Ford drily. He waited blankly a moment, while Boynton watched him with cheery interest. "I suppose it was my misfortune to have been able to expose the whole performance at any moment. I didn't think it worth while."

"It was *not* worth while," Boynton interposed. "Those people would not have accepted your *exposé*,—I can't say that I should have accepted it myself; and in your effort to fulfil a mission, a mere mechanical duty, to society, you might have placed obstacles in the way of the most extraordinary developments. Nothing is clearer to my mind," he proceeded impressively, "than that it is our business, after the first intimations of a desire for converse on the part of spirits, to afford them every possible facility, to suggest, to arrange, to prepare agencies for their use. Suppose you had detected Madame Le Roy in the employment of stuffed gloves; at the very moment when you seized upon the artificial apparition, a *genuine* spirit hand might have been about to manifest itself, in obedience to the example given. My dear sir," cried Dr. Boynton, leaning from his perch on the sofa toward the place where Ford sat, "I have gone to the very bottom of this matter, and I find that in almost all cases there is a degree of solicitation on the part of mediums; that where this is most daring the results are most valuable; and what I wish now to establish as the central principle of spiritistic science is the principle of solicitationism. If the disembodied spirits

do not voluntarily approach, invite them; if they cannot manifest their presence, show them by example the ways and means of so doing. Depend upon it, the whole science must die out without some such direct and vigorous effort on our part."

He paused, leaving Ford in a strange perplexity. The smoothness and finish with which Boynton had formulated the preposterous ideas just expressed rendered it impossible for Ford to approach without irony a confession which he had meant to make in a different spirit. "Then you would not blame me if I had lost patience at any point of the game, and actively interfered in the process of solicitation?"

"As a mere exterior inquirer," returned Boynton blandly, "I could not have blamed you."

"In the dark séance," said Ford, "I *did* interfere. It was my belief that Mrs. Le Roy was affording the agencies, as you express it, in that too. It makes me sick to think that I should have hurt Miss Boynton, and if I could have suspected her of what I suspected Mrs. Le Roy, I should never"—

"You were quite right," interrupted Dr. Boynton courteously as before, but with a touch of pride. "My daughter was entirely

irresponsible, for she was purely the passive instrument of my will; she was carrying out my plan—a plan which the sequel proved triumphantly successful."

"I have said what I wished to say," remarked Ford, rising. "I can well believe that she did only as she was bidden. There were other things that showed that. I leave you to settle with yourself the little questions of honesty and decency in thrusting a helpless girl on the performance of a cheat like that. You seem to be well grounded in your great principle, and I dare say you won't be troubled by my opinions. But my opinion of *you*, Dr. Boynton, is that you are either the most unconscionable knave and quack I have ever seen, or"—

Boynton sprang to his feet. "Not another word, sir! I regret for the sake of human nature to find you a ruffian. But there my concern in you ceases. I defy you to do your worst! Leave the house!"

"You defy me!" said Ford, setting his teeth, and struggling with the rage into which he found himself hurried. "What do you defy me to? Do you suppose I am going to mix myself up in any public way with your affairs? You are perfectly safe to go on and gull imbeciles to the end of time, for all I care."

"I am an honest man!" retorted Dr. Boynton. "I have an unsullied life behind me, spent in the practice of an honourable profession and in earnest research into questions, into mysteries, on the solution of which the dearest hopes of the race repose. Who are you, to attaint me of unworthy motives, to cry pretender and impostor at me? I have met, in the course of my investigations, rude incredulity from the thoughtless crowds who witnessed them, and insolent disdain from those qualified to question, but too proud or too indolent to do so. Till now this indifference has only accused my judgment. It remained for you to asperse my motives."

Dr. Boynton looked the resentment of an outraged man: he gained, in spite of his flowing rhetoric, a dignity which he did not have before. Ford stared at him in momentary helplessness. He was at the disadvantage that every man must be whose habits of life and whose temperament remove him from personal encounter, and who meets others in that sort of intellectual struggle in which his antagonist is for the time necessarily passive.

"You arraign me as a cheat," resumed Boynton, "and you dare to judge my prin-

ciple by the imperfect first steps of those who attempt to put it in practice, by the crudest preliminary processes. But even here you have no ground to stand upon. Even here the ultimate fact utterly defeats and annihilates your insolent assumptions."

"I don't know what you mean," began Ford, "and"—

"I will tell you what I mean," interrupted Boynton, "and you shall judge your own case. If all our endeavours at spirit intercourse were for the ends of selfish deception, as you claim, how do you account for the final response to them? I am willing to believe that it was *your* hand that inflicted a hurt upon a woman,—oh, whether my daughter or Mrs. Le Roy, it was still a woman,—and that invoked any possible consequence from the violation of conditions that you were bound in honour to respect; but *whose* hand was it that evolved itself from the darkness, and then dispersed that darkness? Whose hand was that which crowned my wildest hopes with success?"

"If you mean," said Ford, and he felt that after all it was shocking to own it, "the hand which turned on the gas, it was my hand."

"Your hand?" gasped Dr. Boynton.

"My hand—prepared by a trick so com-

mon and simple that it could have deceived no one but children, or men and women so eager for lies "—

"Oh, it was the truth, the sacred, vital, saving truth, they longed for! And it was this, it was this desire, you deluded!" Dr. Boynton hid his face in his handkerchief, and sank back upon the sofa. "Go now," he said. "I will not, I cannot, I must not hear one word of excuse from you. Your action is indefensible."

"Excuse!" cried Ford. "Do you really think I want to *excuse* myself? Do you think "—

"Why should you not wish to excuse yourself?" solemnly demanded Boynton, uncovering his face, which was pale, but calm. "You have dire need of excuse, if *sacrilege* is a crime."

"Sacrilege!" Ford was aware of forcing his laugh.

"Yes, sacrilege. You intruded upon religious aspirations to turn them into ridicule. You derided the hope of immortality itself,—the evidences through which thousands cling to the belief in God."

"You are such a very preposterous creature that I don't quite know how to take you," said Ford; "but I will ask you what

you were doing yourself in making those simpletons think there were spirits present among them?"

"I was leading them on to the evolution of a great truth, to the comfort of an assured immortality. But you,—were you aiming at anything higher than the gratification of the wretched vanity that delights in finding all endeavour as low and hopeless as its own? Oh, I know your position, young man! I know the attitude of those shallow sciences which trace man backward to the brute, and forward to the clod. Which of them do you profess? They all join in a cowardly contempt of phenomena which they will not examine; and if one of their followers, more just, more candid, than the rest, like Crookes, of London, ventures into the field of investigation, and dares to own the truth, they unite like a pack of wolves to destroy him. His methods are non-scientific! Bah! Did you think you were doing a fine thing that day, when you lay in wait to dash our hopes,—to prove to us by the success of your trick that we were as the beasts that perish?"

"I can't say that I intended to trouble myself to expose you to them," said Ford.

"Then how much better were you," retorted Boynton, "than the worst you think

of me? You call me an impostor. What were you but an impostor who wished to fool them to the top of their bent, for the sake of laughing them over in secret, or among others like yourself?"

"Here!" cried Ford. "I am sick of this foolery, and I warn you now that I will laugh *you* over with this whole city, if I know you to give another séance or public exhibition of any sort here. I believe there are no laws that can reach you, but justice shall. I am going to put an end to your researches, in Boston at least."

"You threaten me, do you?" cried Dr. Boynton, following him in his retreat from the room. "You propose, in your small way, to play the tyrant, to fetter my action, to forbid me the exercise of my faculties in the pursuit of truth! And you think I shall regard your threats? Poh, I fling them in your face! I value them no more than I care for the miserable trick by which you have burlesqued without retarding my inquiries for an instant."

"Very well," retorted Ford, "we shall see!" He crushed on his hat, and left the house, Boynton pursuing him to the door with noisy defiance, and remaining on the outer threshold to look after him.

## IV.

DR. BOYNTON watched Ford out of sight, and then, hot and flushed, turned back into the house. He did not return to the parlour, where the stormy scene had taken place between them, but went to his daughter's room. Egeria lay there in the twilight that befriended the shabbiness of the chamber, upon a lounge wheeled away from the wall, and at his entrance she asked, without lifting her eyes to his face (for women need not look at those dear to them to know their moods), "What is it, father?"

"Nothing, nothing," panted her father, with a poor show of evasion.

"Yes, there is something," sadly persisted the girl. "Something has happened to worry you."

"Yes, you are right!" cried Dr. Boynton with vehemence. "I have just met the grossest outrage and contumely from a man whom—whom— But, Egeria," he broke

off, "tell me how you knew I was troubled. Did you hear angry talking?"

"No, I didn't hear anything. Who was the man, father?"

"Did you notice anything in my manner?"

"No, I saw nothing unusual."

"Then how did you know? Try to think, Egeria," said her father eagerly. "Try to trace the processes of your intuition. This may be a very important clew, leading to the most significant results. How could you suspect, having heard nothing, and in this darkened room having seen nothing, strange in my manner, — how could you divine that something had occurred to trouble me? How did you know it?"

"Oh, I suppose I knew it because I love you so, father. There was nothing strange in that. Oh, father, you promised me that you wouldn't speak of those things again, just yet. They wear my life out." He had drawn his chair, in his excitement, close to her couch, and sat leaning intently over her. She put her arm round his neck, and gently pulled his face down on her pillow for a moment. "Poor father! What was it vexed you?"

Boynton freed himself, instantly reverting with his first vehemence to the outrage he

had suffered. "It was that young man,—that Ford, who was here the other night. He has gone, after heaping every insult upon me,—after telling me to my face that it was he who seized your hand in the dark séance, and produced by a trick the effect of the luminous spirit hand which turned on the gas. He dared to call me an impostor, to taunt me with forcing you to take part in my deceptions,—and this after the fullest and freest and frankest statement from me of the principle upon which I proceed in these experiments. And he ended by threatening me — yes, by threatening me with public exposure if I gave another séance in this city. The insolent scoundrel! If I had been a younger man, I should have replied in the only fitting manner. As it was, I treated his threats with contempt. I answered him taunt for taunt, and I defied him to do his worst. I a quack, — the shameless swindler! To take part in a mystery whose conditions bound him to good faith, and to defeat all its results by his miserable trickery!" Boynton started up and crossed the room. Suddenly he broke out, "Egeria, I don't believe him! I don't believe it was he who hurt you! I don't believe that he produced that effect

of a luminous hand! I believe that in both cases supernatural agencies were at work; they must have been; and a man capable of wishing to defeat our experiments would be quite capable of claiming to have done so. He is a heartless liar, and so I will tell him in any public place. *He* forbid me to give another séance in Boston! *He* force me to quit this city in defeat and ignominy! I would perish first!"

"Oh, I wish we could go away! Oh, I wish we could go home!" moaned the girl, when the doctor's furious tirade had ended.

"Egeria!"

"Yes, father," said the girl, desperately; "I hate this wandering life; I 'm afraid of these strange people, with their talk and their tricks and their dupes, and your part with them."

"Egeria! This to your father? Do you join that scoundrel in his insult to me? Do you wish to add a crueller sting to the pain I have suffered,—you who know how unselfish my motives are? Do you deny the power—the strange power—which you have yourself repeatedly exercised, and which you have not been able to analyse?"

"No, no, father," said the girl fondly, rising from where she lay, and going quickly

to the chair into which her father had sunk, "I don't deny it, and I don't doubt *you*. *How* could I doubt you?" She sat down upon his knee, and drew his head against her breast. "But let's go away! Let us go back to the country, and think it all over again, and try to see more clearly what it is, and—and—*pray* about it!" She had dropped to her knees upon the floor, and held his hands beseechingly between her own. "Why shouldn't we go home?"

"Home! home!" repeated her father. "We have no home, Egeria! We might go back to that hole where I have stifled all my life; but we should starve there. My practice had dwindled to nothing before we left; you know that. Their miserable bigotry could not tolerate my opinions. No, Egeria, we must make the world our home hereafter. We must be content to associate our names with the establishment of—of a supreme principle, and find our consolation where all the benefactors of mankind have found it,—in the grave." Boynton paused, as if he had too deeply wrought upon his own sensibilities; but he resumed with fresh animation: "But why look upon the dark side of things, Egeria? Surely you are better with me here than in that old house,

where they would have taught you to distrust and despise me? You cannot regret having decided in my favour between your grandfather and me? If you do"—

"Oh no, father! Never! You are all the world to me; I know how good you are, and I shall *never* doubt your truth, whatever happens. But go—let us go away from here—from this town, where we 've had nothing but trouble, where I 'm sure there 's some great trouble coming to us yet."

"Do you think so, Egeria?" asked her father with interest. "What makes you think so? What is the character, the purport of your prescience?"

"It 's *no* prescience! It 's nothing. It 's only fear. Everything goes from me."

"That is very curious!" mused Boynton. "Could it be something in the local electric conditions?"

"Oh, father, father!" moaned the girl in despair.

"Well, well, my child! What is it then?"

"You have quarrelled with this—this Mr. Ford?"

"Yes, Egeria; I told you."

"And he has threatened you, if you stayed—threatened to do something—I don't know—against us?"

"I suppose he means to vilify me in the public prints."

"Oh, then, don't provoke him, father,—don't provoke him. Let us go away."

"Why, Egeria, are you afraid for your father?"

"I 'm afraid for myself," answered the girl, cowering nearer to her father. "He will come to see us, and I shall fail, and he will ruin you!"

"Egeria," said Dr. Boynton, "this is very interesting. I remember that on the day he came here—the day of the séance—you seemed to be similarly affected by his sphere, his presence. Can you analyse your feeling sufficiently, my child, to tell me why he should affect you in this way!"

"No," said Egeria.

"Do you remember any one else who has affected you as he has?"

"No, no one else."

"Very curious!" mused Dr. Boynton, with a pleased air of scientific inquiry. "Very curious indeed! It opens up a wholly new field of investigation. All these things seem to proceed by a sort of indirection. We may be further from the result we were seeking than I supposed; but we may be upon the point of determining the nature of the chief

obstacle in our way, and therefore—therefore— Um! Very strange, very strange! Egeria, I have felt myself, ever since we came to Boston, something singularly antagonistic in the conditions."

"Oh, then, you 'll go away, won't you, father,—you 'll go away at once?" pleaded the girl.

"I am not sure," answered Dr. Boynton, in the same musing tone as before, "what our duty is in the premises. Suppose, Egeria," he continued with spirit,—"suppose that this antagonistic influence were confined to a single person in a population of two hundred and fifty thousand souls; would it not be a striking proof of the vastness of the resistance already overcome by spiritistic science, and at the same time an—a—a—indication of responsibility in the matter which we ought not to shun?"

"I don't understand you, father," said Egeria, fearfully.

"I mean," replied her father, "that it may be our duty to sink all personal feeling in this matter, and bend every energy to the conviction, the conversion, of the person who thus antagonises us."

The girl stood aghast, and for a moment did not reply, but glanced at her father's

heated face and shining eyes in a sort of terror. Some instinct, perhaps, flashed upon her a fear against which the habit of her whole life rebelled, and kept her from directly opposing him. She subdued the tremor that ran through her, and answered, "You know that I think whatever you do, father. How — how" — She apparently wished to temporise, to catch at this thought and that; without uttering any, she stopped short.

"How should I go about it?" radiantly demanded her father. "In the openest, the simplest manner possible, by submitting your—your gift to the test of opposing wills; by inviting this man to a public contest, in which, laying prejudice aside, he and I should enter the lists against each other in a fair struggle for supremacy. I am not afraid of the issue. In this view he is no longer an enemy. He is a blind opposing force of nature, which is simply to be overcome; he can no more have insulted or wronged me than the rock against which I strike in the dark, than the tempest that dashes its drops in my face. Poor, helpless, blameless obstacle! I am ashamed, Egeria, that I used harsh language to him; I am ashamed that I retorted from my vantage-

ground the merely mechanical outrage which I suffered from him. My first business must be to—to—apologise; to seek him in a spirit of passive good feeling, and to invite him in a sentiment of the widest liberality to enter upon this rivalry; to—to"— He bustled about the room, seeking his hat. "It is my duty, it is my right, it is my sacred privilege, to go to him without a moment's delay, and withdraw every offensive expression that I may have used in the heat of—of—controversy; to solicit, upon whatever terms of personal humiliation he makes, his co-operation in this experiment; to conjure him by our common hopes of immortality"— Boynton had found that his hat was not in the room; he made a swift dash towards the door. Egeria flung herself against it, and, holding it fast, stretched out both her hands towards him.

"Wait!"

Her father suddenly arrested himself. "Egeria!"

"What—what"—the girl panted tumultuously—"what—if I can't submit to the test?"

Boynton looked at her in stupefaction, as if this were a point that had not occurred to him; but she confronted him steadily. "You cannot refuse," he began.

"You have not considered this matter yet, father," said the girl. "You have not taken time"—

"Time, time!" retorted her father, with wild impatience. "There *is* no time! Eternity hems us in on all sides! It presses and invades at every point! The man may die; a wretched casualty—a falling timber on the street, a frightened horse, an open cellarway—may snatch him from me before I can use him for the purpose to which Providence has appointed his being. And you talk of time! Come, my daughter, let me pass! You are not you, nor I I, in such a crisis as this."

The girl moved from the door, and cast her arms about his neck, as he quickly advanced. "Oh, father, father!" she cried, "what is it you mean to do?"

"Why, I have told you, child," he answered, putting up his hands to unclasp her arms.

"Yes; but if I failed?" she implored, clinging the closer. "Remember that I have been sick, that I am still very weak, and wait—wait a little."

Boynton's mood changed instantly. "Ha!" he breathed, and continued in his tone of scientific investigation: "Are you sensible,

Egeria, of any distinct loss of psychic force through the diminution of your physical strength?"

"How can I tell, father? It is you who do it. I see, or seem to see, whatever you tell me. I have always done that. It began so long ago, when I was so little, that I can't remember anything different. I *want* to please you; I *want* to help you; but I don't know if I can, father. It has always come from my thinking that what you wished was perfectly wise and right."

"Yes, yes," said Boynton, "that is of course a condition of the highest clairvoyant force, though I don't remember to have heard it formulated before."

"And don't you see, father," said the girl, looking tenderly into his face, as if she would fain interpose her love between him and what she must say, "that if I lose this perfect confidence I lose my power to do what you want me to do?"

Dr. Boynton was hurt through the shield of her affection. "Have I done anything to forfeit your trust in my purposes, Egeria? If I have, it is certainly time for me to despair."

"Oh, no, no, father! I trust *you;* I love you this moment more dearly than ever I

did. But are you sure—are you sure that it will all come out as you think? Are you sure that we are taking the right way? We have been trying now a long while, and I can't see that we 've accomplished anything. Perhaps I 'm not a medium, but only a dreamer, and dream what you tell me. I 'm afraid sometimes it isn't right. I was thinking about it just before you came in. What if there *should* be nothing in it all?"

"*How* nothing in it?"

"What if you were deceiving yourself? I can't tell how much my wanting to please you makes me— Oh, I 'm afraid—I 'm afraid it 's all wrong."

"Egeria," said Dr. Boynton, severely, "I have often explained to you my principle in regard to these matters. These are the first steps. It is necessary that we should take them. Other steps will advance from the world of spirits to meet them. I am convinced—I *know*—that in your last séance we had direct proof of this; and I will yet compel, I will *extort* from that lying villain the confession that he had no agency in the things he claims to have done." Boynton had lost his compassionate sense of Ford as an irresponsible moral force, and as he walked up and down the floor he broke from time to

time into expressions of vivid injuriousness. "Listen, Egeria: I respect your conscientious scruples, though they belong to a petty personal conscience that I hoped before this you had exchanged for the race-conscience that gives *me* perfect freedom to think and to act. I will set the matter before you, and you will see the logical sequence of my course. In the development of the phenomena which now agitate the world, mesmerism came first, and spiritism came second. I follow this providential order, and I begin with mesmerism. In this, the results are unquestioned in your case. You have been accustomed all your life to my controlling influence, my magnetic force, by which you have seen, heard, touched, tasted, spoken, whatever I willed. I knew this and you knew it. A thousand successful experiments attest its truth. Well, when we come to deal with disembodied life, we have to deal with it as I deal with you. We have to show this life how to approach us; to suggest, to intimate, to demonstrate, the ways and means of communication with us. The only *perfectly* ascertained fact of spiritistic science is the rap. This, with the innumerable exposures and explanations which expose and explain all the other phenomena, remains a mystery,

insoluble, whatever we attribute it to. But as a method of commerce with the other life, it is nearly worthless,—slow, vague, uncertain. We *must* advance beyond it, or retire for ever from the border of the invisible world. Now, then, you see the unbroken chain of my reasoning, and as an investigator I take my stand boldly upon the necessity of first doing ourselves what we wish the spirits to do. A feeble sense of right and wrong may call it deceit; a vulgar nihilism may call it trickery; but the results will justify us—they *have* justified us. What I wish to do now, Egeria, is to determine whether an opposing force of doubt, embodied in a powerful intellectual organism, such as this man's undoubtedly is, can annul, can annihilate, the progress we have made. We cannot meet this force too soon; for if it *is* able to do this, we may have to retrace all our steps and begin *de novo*."

Egeria listened drearily to her father's harangue, and at the pause he now made she looked hopelessly at his eager face, and did not reply, though he evidently expected some answer from her.

"After all, Egeria," he resumed impatiently, "you have no manner of responsibility, moral or otherwise, in the affair.

You have simply to yield yourself, as heretofore, to my will, and leave me to take the consequences. I will meet them all. But I wish, my daughter, to satisfy your minutest scruple. If you were acting in that séance upon the theories which you have often heard me advance; if you were supplying to the invisible agencies we had called about us the model, the prototype, the example, needed for communication with us; and if when that man seized your hand—granting that it *was* he who did so—you were yourself consciously doing any of the things supposed to be done by the spirits"—

"I tried to bring myself to it; but I couldn't, father, I couldn't!"

"Then—then," panted her father, in a tumult of rising excitement, "it was not *you* who did those things? It was not *you*"—

"No, no!" desolately answered the girl. "From the moment the windows were darkened till my hand was seized, I did nothing but sit quietly in the centre of the circle and strike my palms together, as Mrs. Le Roy told me."

"Thank God!" shouted Dr. Boynton in an indescribable exaltation. "I *knew* I could not be wrong; I *knew* that you had no part in those things. This is a glorious

moment! This—this—is worth toiling and suffering and enduring any fate for!" He caught his daughter in his arms and pressed her to his heart, kissing her fondly and caressing her hair. "Now, *now*, everything is clear before me."

"I am so glad, father," Egeria began. "I was afraid you expected—that you would be disappointed—but indeed"—

"No, no! You were right! Your psychical perceptions were better than my logic. They taught you where to forbear. Your *conscience*—I am humiliated beyond expression to have undervalued it as a factor of our investigation—has brought us this splendid triumph. Egeria, we stand upon the threshold of the temple; its penetralia lie open before us; we have defeated death!"

The girl was perhaps too well used to the rhetorical ecstasies of her father to be either exalted or alarmed by them; and she now merely looked inquiringly at him.

"Don't you see, my dear," he continued with unabated transport, in reply to her look, "*that* if you did not do these things, they were the results of supernatural agencies? It is this fact, ascertained now past all peradventure, that makes my heart leap."

"Oh!" murmured Egeria despairingly.

"But I must not lose a moment now. I must see this young man at once, and challenge him to the ordeal that will release you from his noxious influence. I hope that I shall be able to treat him in the right spirit, and with the tenderness due an erring mind; I shall do my best, and I have every reason to be magnanimous. But his pretence of having performed by trick what was unquestionably the work of spirits is a thing that he must not urge too far. Or, yes, let him do so! I shall seek nothing of him but his consent to this contest. It may be for the general good that his discomfiture should not only be complete, but publicly complete."

"Don't go, father,—don't go!" implored Egeria, for sole answer and comment upon all this. "Let him alone, and let us go away."

"Go away?" cried her father. "Never! I must overrule you in this, my child," he continued caressingly. "I respect, I revere your power; but it is out of regard for that power that I must combat your weaker mood. It demands of me, as it were, that I should ascertain all its conditions, and remove every obstacle to its exercise."

"Oh, I don't know what you mean," replied the girl, and broke into hopeless tears.

"You *will* know, Egeria," returned her father. "Not only shall I be clear to you, but you will be clear to yourself, as never before. I have now a clew that leads to final results,—the personal conscience in you, the race-conscience in me. I will be with you again in a little while, Egeria. Don't be troubled. Trust everything to me."

He made haste to get himself out of the room, and pausing in the hall on the ground-floor long enough to secure the hat of a visitor of Mrs. Le Roy (who was then in a trance for the recovery of lost property belonging to this gentleman) he issued from the door to which he had lately followed Ford in their common rage. The owner of the hat had a larger head than Boynton, who, as he pushed his way along the street, with his face eagerly working from the excitement of his mind, had an effect at once alarming and grotesque; the squalid little children of the street shrank from his approach in terror, and followed his going with derision.

## V.

EGERIA had made a step after her father, as if to call him back, when he left the room, but she had turned again, and lain down upon her lounge without a word. It would have been useless to call him back; he could only have come to renew the scene that had passed between them, and the result would still have been the same.

From her despair there was but one refuge. She could appeal for help now only to the source of her terrors. The fact, hemming her inexorably in, pressed upon her excited brain with a strange benumbing stress, in which there was yet all possible keenness of pain. Presently, it seemed as if she shrieked out with a cry that rang through the house. In reality she had uttered a little scream in response to a knock at the door.

"Oh, did I wake you?" asked the uncouth servant kindly, putting her head in.

"Yes—no—I was not asleep," answered Egeria, lifting her face from the pillow.

"There 's a gentleman in the parlour wants to see your father; and I don't know—well, I told him the doctor was out, but you was at home. Shall I say you 'll see him? He says you 'll do just as well."

Egeria sprang from her lounge, and flinging open a shutter began to arrange her hair. "Yes; please tell him I 'll come at once." At that moment she had but one sense,—the consciousness that Ford had come, and that she should have the courage to speak to him, and beseech him not to consent to her father's proposal. She did not know how or why she should have this courage, but all fear had left her. She hastily smoothed her hair and arranged her dress, and ran down the stairs into the parlour to encounter her enemy with such eagerness as a girl might show in hastening to greet her lover.

It was Mr. Hatch who came forward to meet her, and who took her hand. "Didn't expect to see me here, Miss Egeria? Well, I 'm rather surprised myself. But I had to come back from Philadelphia before I 'd fairly got started on my grand rounds, and I thought I 'd make one more attempt to say good-bye to the doctor and you."

"I understood—I thought"—began Egeria, her voice shaken with her disappointment,

"I thought it was—it was"— She stopped, and tears came into her eyes.

"I'm sorry it isn't, Miss Egeria," said Hatch kindly. "I would be willing to be anybody else in the world that you wanted to see."

"Oh, I didn't want to see them! I was afraid to see them, and I hoped they had come," answered Egeria.

Hatch smiled, but he looked at her compassionately, his head set scrutinisingly on one side, while she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and recovered herself in a sort of cold despair. "I want you to let me ask you what 's the matter, Miss Egeria," he said, impulsively. "You won't think I 'm trying to pry into your trouble?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, we all know what the doctor is: he 's as good as gold, and as simple as a child, but he hasn't got the practical virtues,—or vices, whichever you choose to call 'em. Now, you know, Miss Egeria, that I respect the doctor rather more than I should my own father, if I had one: has the doctor run short of money?"

"Oh, no, no! Not that I know of! It isn't that at all," Egeria hastened to say.

"Well, that 's one point gained," said

Hatch. "I 'm glad of it. You 'll excuse my asking?"

"Yes,—oh, yes," she answered.

"Well, then, is it something that I can help you about? I don't care to know what it is, but I do want to help you. If I can, without knowing, you needn't tell me."

"You can't help me. But there 's no reason why you shouldn't know. You can't help me against my father, can you?" she asked, putting the case, as women do, at worse than the worst, so as to have the comfort of finding the truth short of the extreme. "How can any one help me against him?" Then, as Hatch stood waiting with a somewhat hopeless and wholly puzzled face, "He doesn't mean any harm," she hurried on distractedly, "but if he does it, he will kill me. He *has* done it, and nothing can save me! He 's talking with him this moment, and planning it all out; and when they are ready I shall have to go out before the people, and try it, and fail."

"Is it some test of your power?" asked Hatch.

"Yes," answered the girl. "That man who was here the other night—that Mr. Ford,—father has gone to him to get him to make some public appointment, and try whether I

can do the things he says I can't do. He has been here. Father wants him to come and test it himself, and that 's what he 's gone to him for; and I know he will; and I can't do *anything* when he 's by.'

She said no more, and Hatch began to walk up and down the room. Presently he stopped before her. "Well, Miss Egeria, there 's only one way out of it. The way is to go and talk to that fellow, and get him not to keep his appointment with your father, if he 's made one."

"For me to go? I thought of that; and then" —

"Oh, no," said Hatch, with a smile. "*I'll* do the going and talking. You make yourself easy about it. But after that, don't you think we could get your father to give this thing up, and go home?"

"Oh, *if* we only could!" cried the girl. "But it 's no use. I have been talking to him, and begging him to; but he 'll never go back in the world. He hates my grandfather."

"The old gentleman was rough on him; but you can't much wonder at it. I 'm not saying anything against the doctor, mind; I don't go back on *him;* I don't forget what he did for me. But we can talk about all

that afterwards. What we 've got to do now is to go and beg off from that fellow. Good-bye, Miss Egeria ; I mustn't lose time."

She stopped him. "I can't let you. It would be throwing blame on my father. I 'd rather let him kill me."

"Oh, I 'll make it all right about the doctor," said Hatch. "No one shall have a right to blame him for anything. Don't you be troubled. I 'll fix it. Don't worry !"

Egeria faltered. "You 'll only lose your time. It won't do any good."

"But you don't tell me not to go ?"

"It won't do any good," she said.

"Well," said Hatch, "I 'm going to see this man, and then I 'm coming back to have a talk with the doctor. I want to go away to-morrow feeling first-rate, and I don't believe I *shall* feel just right unless you take the Eastern road back to Maine about the time I take the Boston and Albany for Omaha.

Egeria followed him from the room, and responded with a hopeless look to the bright nod with which he turned to her at the outer door. As it closed, she stood a moment in the dim entry, and then crept languidly up the stairs to her own room ; she cast herself upon the lounge again, with her face to the

wall, and lay there in the apathy which is the refuge from overstress of feeling. The worst could not be worse than the worst; and whatever happened, it could but be another form, not another degree, of ill.

Hatch hurried upon his errand, and climbed, heated and panting, to Ford's room, and to a loud "Come in!" which followed his knock, he responded by entering and shutting the door behind him.

Ford stood before the fireplace, striking against the brick a burning paper with which he had been lighting his pipe. In this act, he looked round at Hatch over his shoulder, at first vaguely, and then with recognition, but not certainly with welcome. "Oh!" he said.

"Mr. Ford?" asked Hatch.

"Yes."

"I met you at Mrs. Le Roy's. I don't know whether you remember me."

"Yes, I do," said Ford. He drew two or three whiffs at his pipe. "Will you sit down? You know Mr. Phillips." He indicated with a motion of his head a third person, whose face, black against the window, Hatch had not made out.

At the mention of his name, Phillips came forward in his brisk way, and shook hands

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with Hatch. "Oh, yes," he said. "Mr. Hatch hasn't forgotten me. I feel myself memorable since that night. I was then an element of the supernatural. Have you seen our friends lately?"

"Yes," said Hatch. "I've just come from them."

"They're well, I hope? Miss Boynton struck me as a most interesting person. Doesn't her life of excitements wear upon her? Most young ladies find one world as much as they can stand; mingling in the society of two, as she does, must be rather fatiguing."

"Miss Boynton isn't very well, or, rather, she hasn't been."

"Ah, I'm sorry to hear that," said Phillips. "I hope it's nothing serious."

"Well, no," replied Hatch, uneasily. He turned to Ford, who from his superior stature had been smoking down upon Phillips and himself. "Mr. Ford," he added, "I came here from Dr. Boynton's to see you."

"Yes?" said Ford.

Phillips made a polite movement in the direction of his hat. "I think I'll be going, Ford," he explained.

"You can go," returned Ford, taking his pipe from his mouth, "but it isn't necessary.

This gentleman can have nothing confidential to say to me. I'd rather you'd stay—for once."

"You're so flattering," said Phillips, "that I *will* stay, if Mr. Hatch doesn't object. My engagement's at one."

"Oh, not at all," said Hatch, reluctantly. Ford had remained standing, with his back to the fireplace, and Hatch had not accepted his invitation, or his permission, to sit down. "As Mr. Phillips was at Mrs. Le Roy's that night, he might as well hear what I have to say. Mr. Ford," he added abruptly, "I want you to do me a great favour."

"Why should I do you a great favour, Mr. Hatch?" asked Ford, while he looked with half-closed eyes at the ceiling, and blew a cloud of smoke above Hatch's head.

Hatch glanced sharply at him, to see whether he spoke in gratuitous insolence or ill-timed jest. He decided for the latter, apparently, for he returned jocosely, "Well, do yourself a great favour, then."

"I don't feel the need of that," said Ford. "What is it?"

"Has Dr. Boynton been here this morning?" asked Hatch, with the anxiety he could not hide.

"No," said Ford, taking out his pipe, and looking at him.

"Then that makes it a great deal easier. I want to ask you, when he comes,—I know he is coming,—to refuse the proposition he will make you."

"What proposition is Dr. Boynton coming to make me?" demanded Ford, with his pipe between his fingers.

Hatch faltered, and scanned Ford's unyielding face. "I shall have to tell you, of course. He is coming to propose a public test séance with you, in which Miss Boynton's powers shall be put to proof. I ask you to refuse it."

Ford did not change countenance, but Phillips, from the easy-chair into which he had cast himself, smiled, and studied now his friend's sad, cold visage, and now the eager, anxious face of Hatch. "In whose behalf do you ask this?" Ford inquired, beginning to smoke again. "By what right do you ask it?"

"Miss Boynton has been sick, and is still very much unstrung. It would be a kindness, a mercy, to her, if you would refuse."

"How do you know? Do you ask it from her?"

Hatch hesitated in an interval of silence that prolonged itself painfully.

"I don't come at her request," he said, at last.

Ford made no comment, but continued to smoke. His pipe died out; he struck a match and kindled it again; and then smoked as before. "Mr. Hatch," he asked finally, "are you a spiritualist?"

"I am a spiritualist, but I am not a fool," replied Hatch.

"Then you don't care for the effect of this séance on the fortunes of your creed?"

"No, I don't. I care for the effect of it on a young lady who dreads it, and who—and on a man that I owe a good deal to. Look here, Mr. Ford; I don't decide on these things. I suppose spiritualism is a matter of faith, like other religions. These people are in earnest about it; that is, Dr. Boynton is, and his daughter thinks and does whatever he tells her to. I'm sorry they're in the business, and I wish they were out of it. They're good people, and as innocent as babies, both of 'em. I don't like the way you take with me, but you can walk over me as much as you like, if only you'll grant this favour. I'm in hopes to get them back to where they belong. I used to live in their

town, and I know all about them. He 's a visionary, but he 's a good man, and their people are first-rate people. I would do anything I could for him. He 's got a heart as tender as a child."

"Very likely," said Ford, with irony. "But I fail to see why I should let this child-like philanthropist go about preying upon the public. I may have my own opinion of his innocence. What if I told you I had detected them in a trick the other night?"

"I shouldn't believe you," answered Hatch, promptly.

Phillips half started out of his chair, but Ford smoked on unperturbed, and asked, as if the question were a pure abstraction, "Why?"

"Because I know that they *couldn't* cheat."

"But if I told you they did, should you consider them innocent?"

"I shouldn't doubt them in the least. And let me tell you"—

Ford turned his back upon Hatch, and knocked the ashes of his pipe out against the corner of the chimney-piece. "Mr. Hatch, you said, a moment ago, that you were a spiritualist, but not a fool. I shall not say whether I will or will not refuse Dr. Boynton's proposition."

Ford began to fill his pipe again, and paid not enough regard to Hatch's presence to seem to wish him away; it was quite as if he were not there, so far as Ford was concerned.

"Look here," Hatch began, "I am sorry that I offended you. I'm anxious to get you to say that you won't accept Dr. Boynton's challenge."

"I perceive that you are anxious," assented Ford.

"Oh, if I only— It's a very serious matter,—it is indeed! I would do anything to get you to say that. Come, now! The young lady is in delicate health; she will do whatever her father tells her, and if she does this I believe it will kill her."

Ford made no reply.

"I can see the thing from your point of view. I suppose you feel that you have a public duty to perform, and all that sort of thing. Well, now, I'm going to make a strong move to get Dr. Boynton out of this business any way; and I ask you just to hold on till I have a chance to try. Can't you tell him that you 'll think it over? Can't you go so far as to put him off a day, or half a day?"

Ford took a book, and going to a chair at the window began to look into it.

"Come," pleaded the other, "give me some sort of answer."

Ford seemed not to have heard him.

"Well, sir," said Hatch, "I 've done with you!" He stared at Ford in even more amaze than anger, and after waiting a moment, as if searching his mind for some fitting reproach, he turned and went out of the room.

Phillips rose from his chair with a shrug. "My dear fellow," he said, "I hope you 'll let me know when this ordeal takes place."

"What ordeal?" asked Ford, without looking up from his book.

"Surely I needn't specify your public test séance with the Pythoness and her papa."

"I am not going to meet Dr. Boynton in the way you mean," returned Ford, quietly.

"No? Why, this is magnanimity!"

"I 've no doubt it 's inconceivable to you."

"Not at all! I know you better; you could be magnanimous to carry a point. But it must be inconceivable to our friend who has just left us. I fancied he was something in leather. Should you say shoes, or leather generally?"

Ford scorned to notice the conjecture as

to Hatch's business. "Are you fool enough to suppose that Dr. Boynton ever intended to come to me on such an errand?"

"Why, I fancied so."

"You had better bridle your fancy, then. He has too much method in his madness for that. What he wanted was my refusal, beforehand, for professional use. He didn't get it. This fellow is part of the game. But I don't wonder you sympathise with him. He is a brother *dilettante*, it seems. He dabbles in ghosts as you dabble in bric-a-brac. He believes as much in ghosts as you believe in your Bonifazios. They may be genuine; in the meantime, you like to talk as if they were. Upon the whole, I believe I prefer blind superstition."

"Why, so do I," said Phillips. "The trouble is to get your blind superstition. I confess that when I was at Mrs. Le Roy's, —what an uncommonly good factitious name for the profession!—and saw the performances of the phantom-like Egeria,—*that's* a good name, too!—I experienced a very agreeable sensation of fear. It was really something to be proud of. But it wouldn't last. It haunted me for a night or two; but I'm no more afraid in the dark now than I was before. And the worst of it is

that my interest in the affair is gone with my terrors. Apparitions have palled upon me. It is quite as the good doctor said: people bore themselves with séances very soon. The question at present is, Will you go with me to Mrs. Burton's to lunch?"

"No," said Ford.

"You're in the wrong, Ford," argued Phillips. "You would please Mrs. Burton by coming; but it won't matter to her if you don't. That's the attitude of society towards the individual, and upon the whole one can't complain of it. You had better come. Mrs. Burton is really making a very pretty fist at a *salon*. In the first place, she keeps Burton out of the way: it's essential to a *salon* not to have the husband in it. You will meet the passing Englishman there, whoever he is; you stand a chance of seeing the starring actor or actress,—operatic or dramatic; authors we have always with us, and painters, of course. Mrs. Burton is so far from pretty herself that she is not afraid to ask charming women who are also beautiful; you've no idea what decorative qualities beautiful women have. And then she introduces the purely American element, the visiting young lady. Really, she has an uncommon feeling for pretty girls; I

never knew her to have an inharmonious young person staying with her yet; with her sense of values, the composition of her *salon* is delightful. Will you come? She told me to bring you; what excuse shall I make?"

"Tell her that I 'm not the sort of person to be brought."

"Oh, there you do yourself wrong. I shall be more just to her ideal of you. Good-bye."

A knock was heard at the door, and Ford, without rising, growled, "Come in."

The door flew open, and Boynton burst into the room in the face of Phillips, who was just going out. He caught him by the hand.

"Why, Mr. Phillips, is it possible! This is doubly fortunate. Finding you and Mr. Ford together,—it 's more than I could have hoped! I consider it a privilege—a privilege, in the old religious sense—to be allowed to say in your presence what I wish to say to our good friend here. Mr. Ford, I wish Mr. Phillips to hear me ask your pardon—humbly ask your pardon—for the violent language I used towards you at my lodging an hour ago." Phillips grinned his triumph at Ford, but softened the derision to a smile, as he turned again to Boynton.

"Will you sit down?" said Ford, with grave kindness, and without any token of surprise.

"Thanks, thanks! But not till I have taken you by the hand." Boynton stretched forth his small hand, and took the mechanically granted hand of Ford. "I wish to say that I have unexpectedly been enabled to see the subject-matter of our difference from your point of view, and that I now recognise not only the justice, but the necessity—the necessity by operation of an inflexible law—of your attitude. In all these things," continued Boynton, placing himself luxuriously in Ford's deep chair, and didactically pressing the tips of his fingers together, "there *is* a law which I had quite lost sight of,—the law of progression through the antagonism of opposites."

Phillips made an ironical murmur of assent and admiration; Ford remained silent.

"We are both, outside of our mere individual consciousness, blind forces. I affirm, you deny. We grind upon each other in the encounter of life, and a spark of light is evoked by the attrition. It was just so this morning: light was evoked by which I shall always see the correctness of your position and the error of mine. Understand me: I do

not at all agree with you in your opinion of the phenomena; and I have come, so far as that is concerned, to cement our enmity, if I may so speak." He smiled upon Ford with caressing suavity. "But what I have come for first is to withdraw all offensive expressions, and to say that I approve, even in its extreme, of your action on the afternoon of the séance." He beamed upon Ford, and then turned his triumphantly amiable face upon Phillips.

"Ford," said the latter, "this is very handsome!"

"Not at all, not at all!" cried Boynton; "simple duty,—self-interest, even. For I have a request to make of Mr. Ford,—a favour to ask. I wish Mr. Ford not only to continue steadfast in his opposition to my theories, but to assist me in a public exhibition, by antagonising to the utmost of his power their application. I have learned from my daughter that she had no agency in the phenomena which we witnessed the other night, and of whose verity I am now perfectly convinced; and I wish Mr. Ford to join me in testing her supernatural gifts, either before a popular audience, or such persons, in considerable number, as we may select in common."

"I must refuse, Dr. Boynton," said Ford, gently.

Boynton's face fell. "I hope," he said, "you do not refuse because I have been remiss in not coming to you sooner."

"No," began Ford; but Boynton interrupted him.

"I started almost immediately upon your departure from my lodgings, to follow you up and make this application. But I was delayed by an accident: a child was run over in the street almost before my eyes, and was carried into the next apothecary's. The force of habit is strong; I remembered that I was a physician, and forgot the larger in the lesser duty, till other attendance could be procured."

Ford frowned. "It has nothing to do with your delay. What you propose is quite out of my way. I could not consent to it on any conditions. I went to your séance the other day out of an idle whim. I don't care anything about the matter. I don't care whether there is any truth in your opinions, or any error in mine. I refuse because I am thoroughly indifferent to the whole thing."

Boynton rose, and buttoned his threadbare coat across his plump chest. "And you consider, sir," he said, "that you have in-

curred no responsibility towards me, towards humanity, by going as far as you have, and then refusing to proceed?"

"That is my feeling," said Ford respectfully.

Boynton stood as if stupefied. "And— and— Excuse me, sir," he said, coming to himself, "if I remark upon the suddenness of your indifference. One hour ago, you threatened that if I pursued my inquiries in this city you would expose me, as I understood, in the public prints. You left me with that threat upon your lips."

Phillips looked inquiringly at Ford, who said, "I left you in a passion that I'm ashamed of. I have no idea of carrying out that threat."

"Poh, sir!" cried Boynton, with mounting scorn. "You refuse, not from indifference, but from the sense of your inability to cope with me in this test."

"I am willing you should think that," assented Ford.

"I call this gentleman to witness," said Boynton, "that you have slunk out of a contest which you have provoked, and that you are afraid to meet me upon terms even of your own choosing. An hour ago I parted with you in hate; I now leave you in con-

tempt. Good-morning, Mr. Phillips." Boynton had already turned his back upon Ford; he now strutted from the room without looking at him again.

"Our friend is violent," observed Phillips, when the door had closed upon him. Ford made no reply, and Phillips continued: "I fancied his accident rather too opportune."

"Very likely," said Ford.

"And you won't go with me to Mrs. Burton's?"

"No."

"I don't wonder at your indifference to society, with such really dramatic excitements in your own life. The matinée has been extraordinarily brilliant — for a matinée. They 're apt to be tame."

## VI.

IN spite of the defiant temper in which Boynton had quitted Ford's lodging, he reached his own in extreme dejection. He found Hatch with Egeria in the parlour.

"Well, my friend," he said, wringing Hatch's hand, as he passed him on his way from the door to the sofa, "I have met with a great disappointment." Neither Hatch nor Egeria questioned him, but after an exchange of anxious glances waited silently. "It isn't that I care for the frustration of my hopes; I *do* care for that; but that is a small matter compared with the loss of my faith in human nature, my reliance upon the willingness of man to make sacrifices tending to—to—solve, to unravel our common riddle." He let his head fall upon his breast.

"Oh, father," pleaded Egeria tremulously, after the little dramatic pause which Boynton had let follow upon his period, "did you go to see him?"

"Yes," said her father.

"And did he—is he going to do it?"

Boynton lifted his head. "No," he said, solemnly; "he refuses." Egeria drew a long breath, and turned very pale. She seemed about to fall from her chair, which she had drawn next the corner of the sofa on which he had thrown himself. Hatch made a movement toward her, but she recovered herself, and sat strongly upright.

"He refused?" she gasped.

"My dear friend," said her father, looking toward Hatch, while he took her cold hand and gently smoothed it, "I must explain that I have had two interviews with this man, and what their nature has been. He came here this morning to boast that it was he who caught Egeria's hand in the séance that day. I drove him from the house. Afterwards, upon conversing with Egeria, I learnt that the manifestations were really genuine, and that at the moment he caught her hand she had no agency whatever in their production."

Hatch looked at Egeria. "I could have bet my soul on that!"

"On learning this," pursued Boynton, "I at once determined to challenge him to a new test, in which he should pit his influence over Egeria against mine, and the public

should decide upon the result. He has just refused the challenge, peremptorily and finally, and I have branded him as a coward in the presence of Mr. Phillips."

Boynton flung his daughter's hand away. Hatch and Egeria had the effect of refraining from looking at each other. At last the young fellow said, recovering something of his wonted cheery audacity, "Well, of course it's a disappointment, doctor, but why not look at the bright side of it?"

"*What* bright side of it?" asked the doctor, tragically.

"Oh, it has its bright side," said Hatch, undauntedly. "It saves Miss Egeria from a good deal, and I'm glad of that, for one."

The doctor mistook the word. "Ordeal! There is no ordeal; there could have been no question about the result!"

"Not with you or me. But there's no use trying to deny it,—the public is against you, and would be glad to have her fail."

"Oh, yes, father; you know how it has always been," cried Egeria.

"The circumstances had never been propitious before; but now they were all with us. We *could* not have failed!" replied her father.

"Well, you might," said Hatch. "What

do you think *did* produce the manifestations that day, doctor?"

"Do *you* ask that question?" demanded the doctor, in astonishment. "I answer, with an absolute certainty, such as I never reached before, the disembodied spirits of the dead!'

"I doubt it," said Hatch, quietly.

"You *doubt* it?" shouted Boynton, in amaze.

"Dr. Boynton, you've told me twenty times that you wouldn't give a straw for manifestations that took place in the presence of a dozen persons. Now, what makes you pin your faith to what happened the other day?" Boynton was silent; all his reasons, so prompt and facile, seemed to have forsaken him. "There were too many people on hand that day for me. You know I'm as much interested in these things, doctor, as anybody, and I should be the last to give aid and comfort to the enemy; but I couldn't go those materialisations, and the dark séance was rather too dark for me. I'll tell you what, doctor, I wish you'd go back home, and start new." Hatch planted himself directly in front of Boynton, who looked at him with astonishment and rising indignation.

"By what right do you presume to advise me?" he asked, with stately emphasis.

"Well, by no right," said Hatch easily; "or else the right that I have from the good you've always done me." The doctor waived away the sense of this with a gesture which was still stately, but no longer severe. "I only speak from my interest in you and Miss Egeria, here. I think it's wearing on her,—wearing on you both."

"Has my daughter complained to you?" demanded Boynton, with more than his former hauteur, looking round at her. She returned his look with a glance of tender reproach, and Hatch answered—

"No more than you, doctor. I'm talking of what I see. And I think you've made a wrong start. I think you've made a mistake. You oughtn't to have ever mixed yourself up with professional mediums. You were on the right tack at home. Now, I say, you just go back there, and you form a disinterested circle,—people that haven't got money in it,—and you go on with your investigations there; and when you've got a sure thing of it, you come out with it. But don't you do it *till* then! Heh?"

"There is reason in what you urge," replied Boynton; "or rather there *was* reason.

But I have advanced beyond the point you indicate. I *have* got a sure thing of it, as you say. I am as fully persuaded of the reality of those manifestations as I am of my own existence."

"Which ones?" asked Hatch.

"Those in the dark séance, and"—

"I'm *not!*" returned Hatch; "but I don't want you to take my opinion for proof against them. I'm going to headquarters for that, and all I ask is, Don't you interfere with my little game." He took the doctor by the shoulders in a friendly caress, as he spoke, and then he rang the bell. The servant-girl put in her unkempt head at the door, with a look of surprise, after first going to the outer door, to see if the ring had come from there; evidently, she was not used to being rung for in-doors. "Ah, Mary—Jenny—Bridget—Susy—Polly—whatever it is," said Hatch; "you just ask Mrs. Le Roy to step here half a second, that's a good girl, and I'll dance at your wedding." The girl vanished, grinning. As the big woman appeared at the door, "Walk right in, Mrs. Le Roy," he called out, and she advanced questioningly, while he closed the door behind her. "Now, it's all among friends, you know, Mrs. Le Roy; we won't keep

you a minute. You know the doctor has some peculiar theories on this subject. We don't care about the materialisations,—*they're* all right; but you just tell us now how much you helped along in the dark séance, the other day."

"Well," said Mrs. Le Roy, with a sly look at each of her listeners, and a smile that ended in a small, thin chuckle, "give the spirits a chance—that was the doctor's idea, as I understood it."

"Exactly," said Hatch, "and you *did* give 'em a chance?"

"Now, Mr. Hatch," said the huge sibyl, with a mixture of cunning and of that liking for Hatch which all women seemed to feel, "what are you up to?"

"I give you my word, Mrs. Le Roy, I m up to nothing you'd object to. I just want to know how *much* of a chance you gave 'em."

Mrs. Le Roy hesitated a moment.

"Well, pretty much all they wanted, I guess," she answered at length.

"Do you mean," said Boynton, "that *you* produced the phenomena in the dark séance?"

"Well, I did give the spirits a fair chance, as you may say," admitted Mrs. Le Roy,

with some awe and some apparent pity for Boynton.

He dropped his face in his hands, and bowed his head against the back of the sofa. "Oh, woman, woman!" he groaned.

"The witness can now retire," said Hatch, and amid Mrs. Le Roy's protestations of good intention and regret, and her mystification as to what it all meant, he took her by her vast shoulders and pushed her out of the door. "You 're all right, Mrs. Le Roy," he explained. "See you again in half a second. Now, doctor," he continued, turning to the desperate figure on the sofa, "you see how it is. It 's just as I said; you 're on the wrong tack. You can't make any headway in connection with professional mediums. You can't have your theories applied in the right spirit. What you want to do is to back out and start new."

Boynton controlled himself, and, turning about, looked up at Hatch with a candour that was full of immediate courage and enterprise. "My friend, you are right! I see my error, now; but experience alone could have shown it to me. I have attempted to work in the public way, when I should have strictly confined myself to the social way. I see that my success depends upon

the application of my theories by followers purely disinterested. It may be that no progress can be otherwise achieved, in psychological science. The experiment must be absolutely free from mercenary alloy."

"Yes," said Hatch; "if you let them see that there is money in it, you can't get an honest count. Human nature is too much for you."

"The true method," Boynton mused aloud, "would be first to form some sort of society, in which the material basis was secured, and in which there would thus be leisure and disposition for the higher research. There are elements in our own neighbourhood which could be as favourably operated with as— Yes, the result will be much slower than I thought; but in the end it will be sure, beyond all peradventure. Egeria!" he cried, starting up, "we will go home!"

"At once—now—to-day?" asked the girl, her pale cheeks flushing.

"This very hour. There is not a moment to be lost. Go and put our things together, child."

Egeria turned towards the door; then she came back towards Hatch. "We won't say good-bye now, Miss Egeria. I shall be at the depot to see you off."

"Yes, don't delay," said her father, impatiently. "We will be off by the first train." She went out, and he mechanically carried his hand to his pocket. "We can't go!" he cried, as if a sudden pang had caught him. "I haven't five dollars in the world; we are in arrears for board. You see, my dear friend, there is no hope."

"Oh, yes, there is," said Hatch, with the ease of a man who had suspected something of this kind. "This gives me a chance to pay you my old bill, doctor."

"My dear sir, I hope you wouldn't offer me an affront," said Boynton, staying the hand with which Hatch was opening his porte-monnaie.

"That's what I said to you when you wouldn't let me settle with you for my sickness,—or words to that effect."

"Mr. Hatch, you—move me!"

"How much do you owe Mrs. Le Roy?" asked Hatch.

"I haven't the least idea," replied Boynton. "It may be three weeks,—it may be two. How long have we been here?"

"We must ask Mrs. Le Roy that." Hatch rang again, and this time Mrs. Le Roy herself answered the bell. "The doctor's going away, Mrs. Le Roy, and he wants to pay up."

"Well, I'm real sorry," said the woman, who had her bonnet on, as if about to go out, "to *have* you go, Dr. Boynton,—you and Miss Egeria both. But I guess you better. I thought, may be, Mr. Hatch was up to something of that kind. I don't think you 're just fit for the business. You put too much dependence on other folks, and you 're sure to get exposed in the end. I don't suppose but what there 's as much truth in it as there is in anything," she said, by way of reservation.

Boynton answered nothing, and at a look from Hatch Mrs. Le Roy added, "Well, it 's two weeks,—thirty dollars in all." She took the money from Hatch and put it in the pocket of her dress. "Well, I'm going out now, and I shall be gone till evening; so if I don't see you again, I'll say good-bye at once, Dr. Boynton. Come and see me when you 're up to Boston."

She held out her hand to Boynton, who refused it with a very short "No!" and a quick shake of the head. "You are a charlatan," he added,—"an impostor."

Mrs. Le Roy stared at him, until his meaning dawned upon her. Then it amused her through her whole huge person, which shook with her enjoyment. "Why, land alive, man! what are *you?*"

"Something quite beyond your comprehension," replied Boynton, with overwhelming state.

"Well, well!" said Mrs. Le Roy, as she went contentedly out of the room, "you certainly *are* a new kind of fool."

They heard the stairs creak under her tread as she went slowly and comfortably up; then they heard her voice, as she made her adieux to Egeria, who was probably too dimly informed as to her father's point of honour to be able to take her stand upon it. "Poor child!" they heard Mrs. Le Roy's voice saying, "I hope you 'll stay at home, and get well rested. You look half sick, now. Good-bye. I wish I could stay and see you off. But I can't. I've got a see-aunts with a patient of mine at her house, and I suppose I must go." She added in a louder tone, for the listeners below, "Take care of that poor old father of yours, and don't let him excite himself. *I* should be afraid he 'd go out of his head,—if he was mine."

Hatch looked at his watch. "You won't be able to get the two o'clock train," he said. "But I 'll tell you what," he added: "you don't want to stay here to-night, after what 's passed between you and Mrs. Le Roy, and

you can take the five o'clock train on the Fitchburg road as far as Ayer Junction, and there you can connect with a train on the new road to Portland. You 'll have a little night travel."

"Oh, that will make no difference," said the doctor. "I would rather travel all night than stay here. I feel that if I 'm to begin anew I can't begin too soon. I shall be eternally grateful to you for your suggestion, my dear friend. I am sure now that it is in the right direction."

"Good!" said Hatch. "I shall not leave till nine o'clock on the Albany road, and I shall have plenty of time to see you off. You 'll have to bank with me to the extent of tickets home, and I 'll have to come down any way and get them for you: I haven't the money about me for them, now."

Hatch seemed to think that the doctor might take offence at this, but he merely said, "Yes, yes; quite right," and gave his hand dreamily, as the young man went out.

"Tell Miss Egeria I will meet you at the depot. Be there with you half an hour before the train starts."

"Thanks," said Boynton, and hardly waited for him to be gone before he lapsed into the easy corner of the sofa, apparently

forgetful of all that had vexed him; his face was eager with the rush of his hopes and purposes, as he abandoned himself to a sort of intense reverie. At times he rose and walked the floor, but mostly he kept his place on the sofa. He took no counsel with Egeria, and he gave her no help in the work of packing, about which she went swiftly in the rooms overhead. It was not a great work, and it was finished before his reverie was ended. She looked in at the door when it was done, dressed for going out in a costume which was at once fantastic and shabby. In her village life it had once been her best dress, and it looked as if there had subsequently been some sketchy attempts to make it over into a street costume for city use; her bonnet was of a former season; her soiled gloves were frayed at more than one of the fingers. "I shall be back in a minute, father," she said, buttoning one of the poor gloves. "I 'm going out on an errand." He looked at her, but did not seem to see her, and she passed on out.

At the next corner she stepped, after a hesitation at the door, into a little shop where they sold newspapers and stationery, and bought a few sheets of note-paper and envelopes, halting some time in her choice.

and finally deciding on some paper of an outlandish colour and envelopes of a rhomboid shape: they were not in good taste, but they were recommended to Egeria as a kind that the shopwoman "sold a *great* many of." Returning to her own room she wrote a letter, which, when finished, she tore up, hiding the fragments in her pocket; she began a second, which she also destroyed; at last she took the pieces of the first, and carefully putting them together copied them slowly in the small, painful hand of one neither acquainted with the bold angularities of the fashionable female scrawl, nor accustomed to write any hand.

At the letter-box in front of the Fitchburg depot she faltered a moment; then, for her father was pushing on into the building, she caught her letter from her pocket, and posted it.

## VII.

FORD received Egeria's letter the next morning. He examined its outside, as people do that of letters coming to them in strange handwriting, and he bestowed a derisive curiosity upon the person who could choose that outlandish shape for a missive. A dashing hand might have authorised the form, but Egeria's hand was timid and feeble, and only heightened its absurdity. She had not quite known how to address him; she had decided at last to begin without that formality.

"I do not know why you refused what my father asked you to do; but we were imposed upon as well as you. You had a right to suspect us; but we had nothing to do with those things. If you knew about us at home you would not regret that you had refused.

"I felt grateful to you; but perhaps it is wrong to write. If it is, I can only say that I meant it truly and rightly.

"EGERIA BOYNTON."

Ford read this note many times over, and then mused long upon it. But he put it by, at last, and did a good morning's work, and at one o'clock he gathered up the copy he had made, and carried it out to the newspaper office. He found himself without appetite for the lunch at his boarding-house, and he wandered about, the early part of the afternoon, playing in his mind with a tendency which was drawing him in the direction of the Boyntons. The origin of all our impulses is obscure, and every motive from which we act is mixed. Even when it is simplest we like to feign that it is different from what it really is, and often we do not know what it is. It would be idle, then, to attempt to give the reason Ford alleged to himself for yielding to the attraction which he felt. His cheek flushed and his pulse quickened, as he mounted the steps to Mrs. Le Roy's door; but this was the mood, half shame and half thrilled expectation, of many people who rang her bell.

The door was set ajar by the servant, who revealed a three-quarters view of her face and a slice of her person in response to Ford's summons. He asked if Dr. Boynton or Miss Boynton were at home, and she answered that they were gone, adding, "I

don't know as they 're gone for good ;" and as he turned lingeringly away she said that Mrs. Le Roy was in.

"I 'll see her," rejoined Ford, and entered.

Mrs. Le Roy made him wait her coming some minutes. He must have been announced to her merely as a gentleman, for after greeting him first with "How do you do, sir?" she added, "Ah, *how* do you do?" as if upon recognition, and offered him her hand.

"I don't know that I ought to have troubled you," said Ford ; "but I wished to ask when you expected Dr. Boynton back."

"Why, they ain't coming back!" exclaimed Mrs. Le Roy. "They 've gone home. Didn't she tell you so?"

"She? Who?" asked Ford.

"The girl."

"Miss Boynton?"

"Laws, no! The girl at the door."

"Oh, I" replied Ford, in confusion. "No ; she said she wasn't certain."

"Well, they have."

Ford rose. After a moment's hesitation, he asked, "They live somewhere in Maine, I believe?"

"Yes, down there some'er's," assented Mrs. Le Roy, indifferently.

"Do you know their address?"

"Well, no, I don't," Mrs. Le Roy admitted. She asked, after a questioning glance at Ford, "Did you want to find out anything about them?"

"Yes," returned Ford.

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Le Roy, I could give you a see-aunts."

"A *what?*"

"A see-aunts,—consult the spirits."

"Oh!" said Ford. "No, thanks. I haven't time now," he said, as he would put off an importunate barber who had offered him a shampoo. "I 'm sorry to have troubled you."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Le Roy, following him out into the hall. "We have test see-auntses the first Sunday evenin' of every month. Should be pleased to see you any time."

"Thanks," said Ford.

At the head of the street he met Phillips, walking toward the Public Garden. "Ah," said Phillips, "I was thinking of you."

"Were you?" growled Ford.

"Yes. I wanted to ask if you 'd heard anything more of the Pythoness and her papa. They 're as curious an outcome of this bubble-and-squeak that we call our civilisation as

anything I know of. How did you find them?"

"I didn't find them; they 've gone away," said Ford, not caring to deny the imputation that he had been to look them up.

"Gone away? How extraordinary! Has the doctor found Boston such a barren field after all? Ford, you 've deprived us of a phenomenon. You ought to have met him. It isn't often that a father comes and invites a young man to contest his control over his daughter. The contest is generally against the old gentleman's wishes. Where have they gone?"

"They 've gone home," replied Ford.

"And that is" —

"I don't know. In Maine somewhere."

"I might have known, in Maine,—the land of Norembega, the mystical city. The witches settled Maine, when they were driven out of Salem. You will find all the witch names down there. Well, I 'm sorry they 're gone. I had counted upon seeing more of them. One doesn't often find such people in one's way. I 've been speculating about them since I saw you, and I find myself of two minds in regard to them,—just as I was before I began. I suppose we must consider them parts of a fraud; the question

is whether they are conscious or unconscious parts of it. If they 're unconscious, it 's pathetic; if they 're conscious, they 're fascinating. I don't wonder you couldn't keep away,—that you had to come and try for another interview with them. As for me, I wonder that I haven't fluttered about them continually ever since I first saw them. The girl is such a deliciously abnormal creature. It is girlhood at odds with itself. If she has been her father's 'subject' ever since childhood, of course none of the ordinary young girl interests have entered into her life. She hasn't known the delight of dress and of dancing; she hasn't had 'attentions;' upon my word, that 's very suggestive! It means that she 's kept a childlike simplicity, and that she could go on and help out her father's purposes, no matter how tricky they were, with no more sense of guilt than a child who makes believe talk with imaginary visitors. Yes, the Pythoness could be innocent in the midst of fraud. Come, I call that a pretty conjecture!"

"Why do you waste it on me?" said Ford. "You could have made your fortune for the evening with that piece of quackery at the next place where you dine."

"Oh, it isn't lost," said Phillips. "I

wasn't wasting it; I was merely trying it on. Will you go with me to see a picture I 'm hesitating about?"

"No; you know I don't understand pictures."

"Ah, that 's the reason I want you to see it. You are the light of the public square, the average ignorance,—an element of criticism not to be despised."

"If I thought I could be of use," said Ford, "I 'd come."

"You can. But what is the matter? Why this common decency?"

"I owe you a debt of gratitude. You 've given shape to the infernal sophistry that was floating through my mind, and made it disgusting."

Phillips laughed. "About the Pythoness? My dear fellow, I 'm proud of that conjecture. It was worthy of Hawthorne."

## VIII.

EGERIA and her father had reached the station an hour before their train was to start; and the time, after the first flush of their arrival, began to hang heavy on her father's hands. Now that he had set his face homeward, he was intolerant of delay. He looked at the waiting-room clock, and compared it with the clock above the tracks outside; he blamed Hatch for not being there to meet them, and fretted lest he should not come at all. It would be extremely embarrassing to be left behind, he said; he complained that it had the effect of placing him in a dependent position, and that Hatch had taken advantage of his temporary destitution to inflict a humiliation upon him. He said he would go out and look about the station while waiting, and he impatiently permitted Egeria to go with him. An idle throng were hanging about the draw of the Charlestown bridge, watching some men in a barge who were supplying air to

a submarine diver at the bottom of the dock. The locality of the diver was indicated by the bubbles that rose and broke on the surface and floated away on the swift tide.

"Egeria," said her father, with instant speculation, "if it were possible to isolate a medium thus absolutely from all adverse influences, great results might be expected. A speaking-tube of rubber, running from the mouth of the submerged medium"— He looked at the girl, who smiled faintly.

"I shouldn't have the courage to go under the water,—I should be afraid of the fish."

"At first, no doubt," replied her father. "But I was not thinking of you. I should like to see the experiment tried with Mrs. Le Roy."

Boynton was not jesting, and his daughter did not laugh at a proposal which would doubtless have amused the seeress herself. "How strange," said Egeria, as they turned away, "the western sky is!"

"Yes; the wind has changed to the east. The Probabilities, this morning, promised a storm."

"And the frames of all these railroad drawbridges against that strange sky"—

"Yes, yes," said her father; "they look

like so many gibbets. It 's a homicidal sight, —or suicidal." He gave a little shiver, and they walked back into the station, where the train they were to take was just making up. Boynton looked about for Hatch, but was arrested in his impatient scrutiny of the others by the presence of two men, whose peaceful faces no less than their quaint dress distinguished them from the rest of the thickening crowd. They wore low-crowned, broad-brimmed hats of beaver; one was habited in a straight-skirted coat of drab, and the other in a like garment of dark blue; their feet, in broad, flat shoes, protruded from pantaloons of a conscientiously unfashionable pattern. Their hair hung long in their necks, and when one lifted his hat to wipe his forehead he showed his hair cut in front like a young lady's *bang*. They seemed quite at their ease under the glance of the passers, and talked quietly on, even when Boynton, expressing a doubt as to whether they were Quakers, halted Egeria, and lingered near them.

"That is so, Joseph," said one who seemed the younger, and was much the graver of the two. "It began with our people, and I think it will get its only true development among us. In the world outside, its pro-

fessors are as bad as the hireling priesthood of the churches."

"Yee," assented he called Joseph, with that quaint corruption through which the people of his sect fail in the scriptural injunction they strive to obey.

"As soon as the money element touched it, it began to degenerate, and now it's a trade, like any other. They are tempted all the while to eke it out with imposture."

"Nay, Elihu, not in all cases. At least, they don't yield to the temptation in all cases. You must not let your judgment be too much swayed by the single case that has come to your knowledge."

"They can't be Quakers," said Egeria, in a low voice; "they say 'you,' and not 'thee' and 'thou.'"

Her father did not answer; he pressed her hand to make her keep silence, and insensibly drew her a little nearer to the men.

"Yee," replied the younger, "it is well to avoid a hasty judgment; but it is foolish to blind one's-self to the facts. And the facts are that in such hands as this gift has fallen into in the world outside it is mere sorcery,—a spell to conjure with."

"Nay, it is something better than that.

It is still a proof of life hereafter to those who could receive no other evidence."

"Yee, that may be. But I feel that it cannot truly prosper except with those who are leading the angelic life, here and now."

These words, these phrases, had visibly made a great impression upon Boynton. His daughter saw that he was longing to accost the speakers. But at that moment she caught sight of Hatch coming out of the ladies' room, and looking anxiously about as if seeking them.

"Oh!" she cried gladly, "there's Mr. Hatch!" and she pulled her father away with her.

The two men turned at the sound of their going, and gazed after them.

"That is a strange couple," said he called Joseph. "Did you notice them as they stood here?"

"Yee, I saw them. They seemed to be listening. But we were not saying anything to be ashamed of, and I thought they could not receive any harm from overhearing us. They look like stage players to me: before I was gathered in, I used often to see such folks."

"Do you think they are man and wife?"

"Nay, I don't know."

"He seemed too old to be her husband."

"That often happens in the world."

"Yee," said Joseph; "but I never like to see a young wife with an old husband. And there is something pleasing in a pretty young couple: they seem happy."

"Nay," returned the other, "what does it matter to us how they mate together?"

They stood looking after Egeria and her father, whom Hatch had now joined. "They seem to have found friends," said Joseph. "I don't think she is the elderly man's wife."

Hatch hurried them into the waiting-room; and then he went to buy their tickets, and have their baggage checked.

"I've got your trunks checked, doctor," he said, when he returned and sat down beside them. "But you'll have to change cars at Ayer Junction. You won't have any trouble, though: you just walk out of the end of the depot, and take the train standing across the track of the one you've come on. You can stop at Portland, when you get there, or you can make the connection, and push right through, and be home by morning. I've been looking it all up for you in this Guide." He drew a book out of his pocket.

"Oh, we shall want to push right through, shan't we, father?" asked Egeria.

But her father had apparently lost all concern in the return home for which he had but now been so eager. He had listened with apathy to Hatch's excuses for his delay, and he had received with indifference the checks and tickets the young man had brought him. "We will see how we feel when we get to Portland," he answered testily, handing the money he had borrowed to Egeria. "Mr. Hatch," he added, presently, with the mystery in which he liked to involve simple things, "are you pressed for time?"

"I have all the time there is," replied Hatch, cheerily.

"Then oblige me by remaining here for a moment with Egeria,—for one moment only."

He left them, and they looked blankly at each other.

"Your father," Hatch began, "seems a little off the notion of going back."

"Yes," assented Egeria, dispiritedly.

"Well, of course; that's the reaction. But he'll be all right again when the train's started. I know how that is. Miss Egeria," he added, looking down at the neat valise between his feet, "I didn't tell the doctor,

but I hope you won't object to company part of your journey. I'm going on your train as far as Ayer Junction." He met her look of amaze with one of triumphant kindliness. "Yes. You know I can go West Hoosac Tunnel way."

"I didn't know," said Egeria.

"Well, I can. And I thought I might be of use to you in changing cars at the Junction, and so I'm going."

"I don't know what to say to you," Egeria murmured, brokenly.

"I thought you'd be glad," said Hatch.

"Yes; only you do too much," returned the girl.

"Well, I'm a little in debt to your father, yet; and I would do anything for—for your father. I hope you'll make him push straight through to-night. I don't think your father's quite well, Miss Egeria. He needs rest. He ought to be home."

"Yes, he needs rest," said Egeria sadly. "I'm glad we're going home. But you know how it is, there, between him and grandfather," she added, reluctantly. "I don't know just where we'll go. We can't go to our old house; there are people in it; and father wouldn't go to grandfather's, after what's passed."

"Oh, you 'll find friends there," said Hatch, hopefully. "At any rate, you 'll be among your kind of folks, and that 's something. And that reminds *me;* here 's a little note I want you to give your grandfather for me. I always liked the old gentleman," he added, giving her a letter. "He and I got along first-rate together. And I guess you can patch it up between him and your father."

"Mr. Hatch," said Egeria, looking at the letter— "Or no, no matter."

"What is it?"

"Nothing; merely something I was going to ask you,—to ask your advice. But it 's done now, and so it would be of no use."

Hatch laughed. "That 's the times ladies usually apply for advice,—after a thing 's done. And, as you say, it ain't of much use then,—at least, not for that occasion."

Egeria smiled sadly. "I suppose I wanted you to think I had done right."

"Well, I think that without your asking me."

Egeria put the letter away in her handbag, and put that carefully behind her on the seat, before she asked, a little tremulously, "Mr. Hatch, what do you think made him change his mind about it after he talked with you?"

An angry flush passed over Hatch's face, as he followed her meaning, and recalled the encounter of the morning. "I don't know. Such a man as that wouldn't need any reason. Perhaps he didn't change his mind. He mightn't choose to let me know what he intended to do."

Boynton returned from the outside, and interrupted their talk.

"I went to see if I could find those two men," he said to Egeria. "Some remarks that they dropped had a peculiar interest for me. But they were gone. Did you notice them, Mr. Hatch? They stood near us when we first caught sight of you."

"Parties in broad-brims? Yes, I saw them. But I didn't notice them particularly. What were they talking about?"

"The life hereafter," said Boynton solemnly, "and the angelic life on earth."

"Well, I don't know about the last, but the first is a good subject for a railroad depot. Makes you think whether you've bought your insurance ticket. Quakers, I suppose."

"No, they were not Quakers," answered the doctor, with dry offence.

"Well, they looked it," said Hatch. "Perhaps they belonged to some of the new religious brotherhoods. I've seen fellows

going round with skirts down to their heels; I believe they 're pretty good fellows, too; they take care of the sick and poor. But I don't see why they can't do it in sack coats."

"It 's possible that these are of the brotherhood you mean," said the doctor. "I wish I could see them again." He looked vexed and disappointed.

"Well, you may run across 'em," returned Hatch, easily. "Perhaps they 'll be on our train." He added, at the doctor's inquiring look, "I 'm going to Troy by the tunnel route; I shall be with you as far as Ayer Junction."

"Oh," returned the doctor, with a little surprise, but with as little interest. "Isn't it time to go on board?"

"Guess we might as well," said Hatch, gathering up Egeria's things and her father's, beside his own compact luggage, and following Boynton, as he went out free-handed. Hatch had taken his berth in the sleeping-car, and he got them seats in this luxurious vehicle as far as the Junction. Boynton stared anxiously about the car, and walked up and down the aisle. "Remain here with Mr. Hatch a moment, Egeria," he said. "I will be back, presently."

Egeria made a little start of protest, but Hatch repressed her with a touch. "Let him go," he whispered, as the doctor pushed off. "He 's after those Corsican Brothers. They can't do him any harm, and they 'll occupy his mind. Who did you think they were?"

"I couldn't tell," said Egeria. "I was sure they were Quakers; but they didn't use the plain language. I think father thought they were talking about the spirits," she added, dejectedly.

"Well, I 'm sorry for that," replied Hatch. "I think he 's got enough of the spirits for one while. But probably they weren't, if they 're any of those new kind of brothers. If they are, I hope he 'll find 'em. They can give him some talk on the other side."

The doctor came back, and sat down with an air of satisfaction. "I 've found them, Egeria," he said. "But the seats all about them were occupied, so that I couldn't get a place near them. I overheard them say that they were going to Ayer, where friends are to meet them."

"Well, that 's lucky," Hatch interposed. "You may get a glimpse of them there. You 'll have to wait twenty minutes for connections. It 's surprising how much you can

do in twenty minutes when you 're on the road. Why, twenty minutes on the road are as long as the good old twenty minutes a fellow used to have when he was a boy. But they won't go any further in the way of time, generally, than twenty dollars will in the way of money, nowadays; we seem to have got an irredeemable paper currency in both things, since I grew up. I wish we could get back to a gold basis. I should like to see half a day or half a dollar of the old size. Why, doctor, you must remember when they were both as big as the full moon!"

The weather had been growing colder since morning, and though they had run out under clearer skies than those of the sea-board, the sun set at last in a series of cloudy bars, through which his red face looked as through the bars of a visor, before it dipped out of sight, and left the west pale and ashen. The lengthening twilight of the season prevailed over the landscape, sodden from long snow, and showing as yet no consciousness of the spring. It was sad and bare, and the girl shrank from its cold melancholy after a shivering glance. Presently her father rose and went into the next car.

"Going to make sure of his Brothers,"

said the young man. He looked at his watch. "We're a little late; but I shall have time to see you on board the Portland train when we get to the Junction. We ought to have had the twenty minutes there together; but we shan't; my train leaves before yours does. I wish I was going on the whole way with you!"

"I wish you were," responded Egeria. "But you mustn't lose any time when we get to the Junction; you might miss your own train."

"I couldn't afford to do that. But there'll be time. Now, I'll tell you what, Miss Egeria: I want you to write to me when you get home. You know I shall want to know you've got there."

"Yes, I will," answered Egeria.

"There!" said Hatch, tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, in which he had written, "that'll fetch me. I shall be a fortnight in Omaha before I push on to California. When I get back, in June, I'm coming to see you!"

"You may be sure we shall be glad to have you," answered Egeria, putting the address in her bag. "I'm so eager to get home, it seems as if I could fly. I'd rather be in the graveyard there than lead the life

we have the last three months. I hope I shall never come away again!" she added, while the tears started to her eyes.

"Well, I hope you won't if you don't want to," said Hatch. "But I guess we won't talk about *graveyards* in that connection. I'm coming back to find you strong and well, and your father in the good old track again."

"Yes," murmured the girl.

The doctor came in and resumed his seat.

"Corsican Brothers all right?" asked Hatch.

"They are still there," replied the doctor, gravely accepting the designation.

"Well, you'll have to cut it shorter than I thought for at Ayer," said Hatch. "We're a little behind time. But I guess you can transact all the business you have with them in fifteen minutes."

"In fifteen minutes?" Boynton lokoed doubtful and unhappy.

"Why," said Hatch, with a laugh, "I'll see that you get the whole time. I'll find your train with Miss Egeria, and put her into it. You ought to have some supper, though. I'll ask the Brothers to hold on till you've had a cup of tea."

"I shall want nothing to eat," replied the

doctor, excitedly. "If you will take charge of Egeria, I shall be obliged to you. I *must* speak to them."

"All right," said Hatch. "Don't be anxious," he whispered to Egeria, as they emerged into the crowd and clamour at the Junction. Locomotives were fuming and fretting under cover of the station; without, their bells were bleating everywhere; people ran to and fro, and were pushed about by men with long trucks; the baggage men hurled the trunks from one train to another, and called out the check numbers in metallic nasals. Hatch made his way with Egeria to the train standing across the Fitchburg track, and piled up her things in a seat. "Remember the train and car," he said, making her look round, when they came out again. "Now come get something to eat." He hurried her into the eating-room, and ordering supper he left her and went to find the doctor. It was some minutes before he returned with him, crest-fallen and disappointed.

"Did you see them?" asked Egeria, interpreting his gloom aright.

"No," said her father, "I have missed them."

"Good-bye, doctor; good-bye, Miss

Egeria," said Hatch, who had been paying for the supper. "That 's my train," he added, at the sound of a bell. "Good luck to you!"

Egeria clung to his hand. "But your supper!"

"That 's the doctor's supper. I shall snatch a bite at Fitchburg."

"Oh!" moaned Egeria. But he was gone, and she turned to urge her father to eat.

"Oh, I want nothing,—I want nothing," he said, impatiently; but the girl pressed him, and after she had made him drink a cup of tea, she followed him out of the eating-room. At the door, he gave a joyful start. There, not ten paces away, were the men whom he had seen at the depot in Boston, and whom he had been so anxiously seeking. A third, dressed like them, and of a like placidity of countenance, was talking with them. Nothing now could prevent Boynton from accosting them. He launched himself towards them with an excitement strangely contrasting with their own calm.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I must beg your pardon for addressing you. But I saw you in the depot at Boston"—

"Yee," interrupted he called Elihu, tranquilly, "we saw you there."

"And—and—I chanced to overhear something in your conversation"—

"Yee," said the other, as before, "we saw you listening."

"Well, well! I confess it,—I confess it!" cried Boynton, even more impatient than disconcerted. "I felt constrained to listen: your words seemed to me a message, a prophecy, a revelation. May I ask, gentlemen, if you were talking about spiritualism!"

"Yee, we were."

"Father,—father, we shall lose our train!" pleaded Egeria.

The three strange men, from studying Boynton intently, turned and looked kindly at her, while he continued, "And were you —you were— Gentleman, this is a subject that interests me greatly,—vitally, I may say. Pardon me if I seem too bold. You were saying that this science, this dispensation,—this—this—call it what you will,—originated with some society of which you are members?"

"Yee."

The bell was ringing for their train to start; Egeria essayed another meek appeal of "Father, our train is going!" and was hushed with a harsh "Silence!" from Boyn-

ton, who eagerly pursued, "And this society —this— Gentlemen, what *are* you?"

"We are of the people called Shakers, replied Joseph.

"Exactly! Exactly! I see it,—I understand it all! I understand now how you can make the only just claim to the development of these phenomena. In your community alone is the unselfish, the self-devoted, basis to be found, without which we can rear no superstructure to the skies. I have wasted my life!" he cried,—"wasted my life! Does your community live near here?"

"Yee," answered the eldest Shaker, cautiously, "some miles back. This brother has driven over from home."

"I wish to be one of you!" said the doctor.

"Nay," answered the Shaker, "that needs reflection."

A train began to cross the front of the station. Egeria's long-suffering broke in tears. At sight of her distress, the Shaker added, "Friend, there goes your train."

"Well, well!" exclaimed Boynton, distractedly, "you shall hear from me!" He turned with Egeria, and ran towards the cars, the Shakers following, and making signals to the engineer. The train moved

slowly, and Egeria and her father scrambled aboard. She led the way to the rear car, in which her things were left; but on going to the seat midway of it which Hatch had chosen for her, she could not find them. She sank down stupefied. Her father noticed neither her loss nor her distress. She waited hopelessly for the conductor's coming, and when he appeared she asked him timidly if he had seen her things. He said he would ask the brakeman about them, and added in the tone of formal demand, "Tickets!" The doctor surrendered them without looking at the conductor. "These tickets are for Portland," said the conductor. "You 're on the wrong train,—this is the down train."

"Oh, put us off, then, please," implored Egeria, "and we 'll walk back."

"Up train left before this did," said the man, "and you couldn't get it any way."

"Oh, what shall we do!" lamented the girl. "How shall we ever get home?"

"I can take you on to Egerton; train doesn't stop till we get there. You can go up on the morning express."

"But we can't pay!" gasped Egeria. "Our money was all in one of my bags!"

The conductor looked as if this might or might not be true. He glanced at Egeria's

shabby dress, and his face hardened as he said, "I can take you to Egerton," and passed on.

Boynton had shown little concern in the matter, as if it were no affair of his. Egeria did not appeal to him for counsel or comfort, but sank back into her seat, and wept silently. In the twilight her tears could not be seen; when it grew darker, and the lamps were turned up, she averted her face, and stared out of the black window with streaming eyes.

When the train stopped, and the brakeman called "Egerton," she led her father from the car, and began to walk with him from the station up into the village.

## IX.

EGERTON is a village that presents a winning aspect to the summer visitor when he goes thither in June, and finds it at peace with all the world, in the shadow of immemorial, uncanker-wormed elms. Its chief street wanders quaintly, with a pleasant rise and fall, and on either hand are the large square mansions of a former day, and the trim, well-kept French-roof villas of ours. Hammocks, with girls reading novels in them, are swung between door-yard trees; swift buggies go by on the wide, dustless street; the children of summer visitors, a little too well dressed, play in the cool paths; all day long there is lounging and light literature and smoking and flirtation on the piazzas of the big summer hotel. But the place is far from being a mere summer resort; it is a village, with its own life, expressed in comfortable homes, in a post-office, an apothecary's, a local bank, and various stores, all elm-bowered.

A lovely country lies about it, dipping to a fertile valley on one side, and stretching on the other level and far, with an outlook to yet further hills.

On the chilly April eve when Egeria and her father walked aimlessly away from the station up into the village, it did not wear the welcome it gives the summer visitor. Here and there a lamp pierced the gathering night, and about the stores and post-office there was a languid stir; but the houses darkled away into the gloom of the country. A wind was rising; it took the elms over the street, and swung their long, pendulous boughs about under the sky, dully luminous with the coming storm.

The doctor had seemed carelessly indifferent about all that had happened; indeed, scarcely cognisant of it. He looked vaguely round as they passed through the space in front of the hotel. "Where are you going, Egeria?" he asked.

"I don't know. We have no money."

"No money!"

"You gave me the money, and I put it into my bag that was carried off on the train to Portland."

"Ah, true, true," responded her father, as if he granted the trivial point for argu-

ment's sake. He added, with a sort of philosophical interest in the fact, "Well, we are beggars now,—houseless beggars, who don't know how to beg! Yet I have no doubt there are doors enough on this street that would fly open at our touch, if it were known that we were without shelter and in need. Where shall we apply, my dear?"

"Oh, I don't know,—I don't know."

"All the houses seem dark," mused Boynton aloud. "If we rang, and made them the trouble of lighting hall and parlour lamps in the belief we were visitors, it would have a bad effect. We will stop at the first house where we see a light at the front windows." But when they came to such a house, it seemed too brightly lighted, and they walked wearily by. At last, they paused before a door where the illumination was neither too brilliant nor too faint; and while they stood questioning themselves as to the form of their petition, the lamp at the window was suddenly blown out. They did not speak, but turned and kept on their way. They had passed through the denser part of the village, and the houses began to straggle at wider and wider intervals along the road. Presently they found themselves in the open country, between meadows and fields, with

what seemed a long stretch of forest in front of them. But before they reached it they came to a wayside country store, in front of which they halted.

"I have an idea, Egeria," said her father. "I will step into this store and pledge your ring for a night's lodging."

"Well," said Egeria, yielding it with dull indifference. She went with him to the door, and lingered there while he addressed the man behind the counter with his airy flourish. It required time for the situation to make itself intelligible. Then the man took the ring extended to him, and looked coldly, not at it, but at Boynton. When the rustic leisure of the establishment had gathered itself about the transaction, he returned it. "I ain't no goldsmith," he said.

"I beg your pardon?" queried Boynton.

The man lifted his voice: "May be it's gold, and may be it's brass."

"Brass!"

"Well, you 'd ought to know. Anyhow, I guess we can't trade." The spectators admired a fellow citizen's cool ability to deal with a confidence man.

Boynton turned away with dignity, and addressed a young fellow in the group. "Can you tell me," he said politely, "my

shortest way to Ayer Junction? I was brought here by mistaking the downward for the upward train at that point." The listeners grinned at the shallow imposture, but the young man answered civilly that if he was going to walk he had better take the road to Vardley, keeping due northward on that street. He came to the door to be more explicit, and, throwing it open, discovered Egeria to the others.

"Funny pair of tramps," said one of them, loud enough for the wanderers to hear.

"I guess they ain't any *tramps*," said the storekeeper, darkly.

"Why?" asked the other.

"Well, *I* guess they ain't tramps," repeated the man in authority. His success in coping with Boynton made the rest feel that he had a meaning withheld for the present from regard for the public good; they kept silent; his interlocutor spread out his hands as in an act of submission above the stove. He did not speak again, but after a while another took up the word.

"They say them Shakers at Vardley keeps a house a puppose for lodgin' tramps," he said, holding his knee between his clasped hands, as he sat, and striking the heel of his boot against the side of the stove.

Another silence followed, while a lounger on the other side of the stove worked his lips for expectoration against the iron; but it was too lukewarm to hiss.

"The old gentleman can put up with 'em, and *keep* his ring, if he steps along pretty spry. 'Tain't more 'n about five mile, is it, Parker?"

After a decent pause, "Well, I don't know what the country 's comin' to," sighed a local pessimist.

"Oh, I guess it 'll all come out right in the end," returned a local optimist. This put the pessimist down; the talk had wandered from horses at Boynton's appearance, and now it reverted to horses.

The young fellow who had gone to the door with Dr. Boynton did not return within; he walked a little way up the street with him and Egeria, and recollected to warn them about a turning to the right which they were not to take. When he parted with them at a corner, he stood and gazed after them, with perhaps a kindly impulse in his heart fainting through bashfulness and doubt, while they held their way till they drew near the edge of the forest. It looked black and dreadful under the darkened sky; they stopped before reaching

it at a little house which stood upon its borders.

"We must ask here," said Egeria desperately.

"Well, you ask then, my dear," said her father. "They won't deny a woman."

Egeria knocked, and after a long interval the light from the rear of the house disappeared, and the door being opened, was held scarily aloft above the head of an elderly woman, who surveyed them with an excited face.

Egeria briefly told her story, and ended with a prayer for a night's shelter. "Just let us sit by your fire. We won't trouble you, and in the morning we will go on."

The woman did not change countenance. "You hain't any of them that 's escaped from the reform school?" she demanded, in a high, frightened voice.

Egeria again explained their case. "I don't know where the reform school is. This is my father, and we are honest people!" she added indignantly.

"Well," said the woman, in the same key as before, and clinging to her preconception, "I guess you better go back. The officers is sure to catch you."

"Oh, and *won't* you let us in?"

"Why, I couldn't, you know,—I couldn't. You just keep right along. It 's early yet, and there 's a tavern up this road,—well, it ain't more 'n four mile, if it 's that; you can put up there."

"Is this the road to Vardley?" asked Boynton.

"Yes, yes,—straight along," said the woman, who had been making the aperture between them smaller and smaller; she now finally closed the door with a quick bang, and bolted it.

"What shall we do?" whispered Egeria.

"I don't know," her father faltered in reply.

"Let us go back to the station," said the girl. "They will let us stay there, and then in the morning we can take the train— Oh, but we haven't any money to pay our way back!" She broke out into a wild sobbing.

"Don't cry, don't cry," said her father, soothingly. "We will walk on. Some one *must* receive us. Or, if not, we can't starve in a single night, and at this season we can't perish of cold." As they resumed their way, something struck lightly in their faces. "Rain?" said Boynton, stretching out his hand.

"No," answered Egeria, "snow."

Neither spoke as they entered the deep shadow of the forest, which in this part of Massachusetts covers miles of country, where the farmer has ceased to coax his wizened crops from the sterile soil and has abandoned it in despair to the wilderness from which his ancestors conquered it.

The road before the wanderers began to whiten. "Oh, when shall we come to a house!" moaned the girl, shrinking closer to her father, and clinging more heavily to his arm.

She started at the sound of voices and the red glare that came from a sheltered hollow of the woods beside the valley into which the road descended. Around a large fire crouched a party of tramps: one held a tilted bottle to his mouth, and another clutched at it; the rest were shouting and singing. As Egeria and her father came into the range of the firelight, the men saw them. They yelled to them to stop and have a drink. The one who had the bottle snatched up a brand from the fire with his left hand and ran towards them. His foot must have caught in some root or vine; he fell, rolling over his bottle and torch, and while he screamed out that he was burning up, and the rest rushed upon him with laugh-

ter for his mishap and curses for the loss of his bottle, Egeria and her father fled into the shadows beyond the light.

Terror gave her force, but when she felt herself safe her strength began to fail.

"I can't go any further," she said, releasing her hand from her father's arm, and sinking upon the wayside bank. "We will wait here till morning."

He made her no answer, but stood looking up and down the road. "Egeria," he said at last, "I fancy that it 's lighter ahead of us than it is behind, and that we 're near the edge of the woods. Try to come a few steps further." He lifted her to her feet, and they moved painfully forward. It was as he said: in a little while the woods broke away on either hand, and they stood in the middle of cross-roads; on one corner was a house. But as they drew near the verge of the open, the sound of voices stayed them; they were the voices of young men and young girls laughing and calling to one another, as they issued from this house on the corner. "It 's a school-house," said her father; "they 've had some sort of frolic there."

"Well, you won't get the Unabridged for spelling *merry*, Jim!" shouted one of the youths to another.

"Oh, how does he spell it?" cried one of the girls.

"He spells it M-a-r-y!"

The laugh that followed repeated itself in the woods.

"That 's a good joke for hoot-owls!" retorted some one who might be Jim.

"A spelling match," Boynton interpreted.

A noise of joyous screaming and scuffling came from within the house as a light was quenched there, with cries of, "I should think you 'd be ashamed!" and "Now, you stop!" and the like; and a bevy of young people came scurrying from the door.

"Hello!" shouted one of the young men, "what about the books?"

"I don't know," answered another. "Guess nobody 'll hurt the books before morning."

"I wish they 'd steal mine!" said the gay voice of a girl.

"But the fire,—we 've left a roaring fire."

"Well, let it burn the old thing down."

"All right!"

They hurried forward, shouting to the party ahead, who answered with a medley of derisive noises.

When they were all gone, and their voices had died away, the wanderers crept to the door of the school-house, which they tried

anxiously. It opened, and they entered. A gush of mellow light from the stove door, left open to let the fire die soon, softly illumined the interior. They drew some benches close to the stove, and sank away from the sense of all their misery.

## X.

THE last thing of which Egeria had been aware before she fell asleep was her own shadow thrown by the firelight against the school-house door. She thought it was this when she looked again. But the door melted away from around the shadow, and the shadow took feature and expression. Rousing herself with a start, she saw that it was a young girl, cloaked and hooded, standing in the open door-way. The pale, bluish light of a snowy morning filled the school-room. The girl stood still, and looked at Egeria with a stony gaze of fear. The past came back to her; the situation realised itself. Her father, a shabby, disreputable heap of crumpled clothing and tumbled hair, was still asleep; her own beautiful hair had fallen down her shoulder.

"We will go,—we will go," she whispered to the girl in the door-way, with a face as frightened as her own. "It 's my father. We were walking to Yardley; we didn't

know where we were, and we found the school-house door unlocked, and we came in." She caught at the wandering coils of her hair, and twisted them into place, and tied on her bonnet.

The girl in the door-way looked as if she would like to run away, but she came in, gasping, and shut the door behind her. "You 're not tramps?" she made out to ask.

"Oh, no, no, no!" replied Egeria, and she incoherently poured out the story of their misadventure.

The other girl drew a long breath. "And you were going to Vardley Station?"

"Yes."

"That 's more than three miles from here." Egeria did not say anything, but she turned to wake her father. "Oh, don't wake him!" cried the other girl, with a new start of terror, and a partial flight towards the door. "I mean," she added, coming back with a blush, "let him sleep. I—I 'm the teacher; and I 've come to build the fire. You can warm by it before you go. The scholars won't be here yet for an hour." Every word was visibly a conquest from fear, a fulfilment of duty.

The teacher took off her waterproof, the

hood of which she had drawn up over her head, and showed herself a short, plain girl, with a homely face full of sense and goodness. Her hair, cut short, clung about her large head in tight rings. She looked at Egeria's ethereal beauty and the masses of her hair, not enviously, but with a kind of compassionate admiration.

The fire had gone down in the stove, and there was still imbedded in the ashes a line of live embers keeping the shape of the original maple stick. She raked the coals forward, laid on some splinters and bark, and then logs, and closed the door; the fire shouted and roared within.

The teacher sat down on a bench across the stove from Egeria, took into her lap the tin pail she had brought with her, and raised the lid, discovering a smaller pail within, packed round with pieces of mince-pie, dough-nuts, and biscuit with slices of cold meat between the buttered halves. She lifted this out, and set it on the stove; she tore some leaves out of a copy-book, and laying them on the iron put the slices of pie on them. She did not say anything to Egeria, who had no authority to interfere with her proceedings. "I 'm sorry it isn't coffee," she said, looking into the pail on the

stove; "but I can't drink coffee; so it's only cracked cocoa. Now wake him."

But the stir of garments, the low voices, and the fragrant smell of the cocoa and mince-pie had already roused Boynton. He lifted himself, looked at Egeria, and stared at the teacher, to whom presently he made a courteous bow. She replied by pouring some of the cocoa into a saucer, which she took from the bottom of the larger pail, and handing it to him.

"I beg your pardon?" he said sweetly.

"There's another saucer," said the teacher evasively; "but you'll have to eat your pie out of them afterwards."

Her father saw Egeria supplied with cocoa, and then drank with the simple greed of a child.

"This—this lady is the teacher, father," said Egeria. Boynton, brightened by his draught, bowed again, and the teacher gravely acknowledged his salutation. "I've told her how we came here."

"Yes, yes," said Boynton; "most disagreeable coincidence. I can assure you that in a somewhat checkered career I have never met with a more painful experience. At times, really I have hardly been able to recognise my own identity. But it's well

for once, no doubt, to find ourselves in the position in which we have often contemplated others."

The teacher took the pie from the smoking paper and slid a piece into each saucer. "I presume it isn't very wholesome," she said, "but I've heard that Mr. Emerson says, if you *will* eat it, you'd best eat it for breakfast, so that you can have the whole day to digest it in."

"Emerson," said the doctor, receiving his saucer with one hand, while he opened his handkerchief and spread it on his knees with the other, "is a very receptive mind. I fancy that there is a social principle in these matters which isn't clearly ascertained yet. Where whole communities eat pie, as ours do, there must be an unconscious co-operative force in its digestion."

The teacher looked at him, but answered nothing.

"I'm afraid," said Egeria ruefully, "that it's your dinner."

"The children always want me to eat part of theirs," the teacher explained. "I couldn't think of your asking at a house for your breakfast. The country is overrun with tramps, and they might suppose"— She stopped and blushed, and then she added

with rigid self-justice, "Well, I don't know as it was so strange I should."

"No," said Egeria, "you couldn't have thought anything else. That's what they took us for everywhere." She spoke with patience and without bitterness, but she did not eat her breakfast with the hungry relish of the outcast she had been mistaken for.

The teacher sat looking at them, and a new sense of their forlornness seemed to flash upon her. "Why, you have no outside things!"

"No," said Egeria; "they all went off on the train we lost."

The teacher said, like one thinking aloud, "If you are not telling me the truth about yourselves, it will be your loss, and not mine." Then she added, "I don't want you should try to walk to Ayer; it would kill you in this snow. You must take the cars at Vardley Station." She drew out her purse. "There," she said, handing Egeria some bits of scrip, "it's ten cents apiece to the Junction; and here," she continued, thriftily putting the biscuit together in a scrap of paper, "is something for your lunch on the cars."

Egeria made no reply. From time to time

she had lapsed from all apparent sense of what was going on. She now looked blankly at the teacher.

Her father was not so helpless. "My dear young lady," he exclaimed, "you are perfectly right in your estimate of the consequences and penalties? If we were deceiving you, we should be the sufferers and not you. There is a law in these things which no individual will can abrogate. In the end, truth and good always triumph." He had finished his pie, and he now took a draught of cocoa. "Have you many pupils?" he asked.

"No," replied the teacher, "not many. The old people say there used to be forty or fifty, but now there are only sixteen."

Boynton shook his head. "Yes, it is this universal tendency to the cities and the large towns which is ruining us. Well, Egeria, shall we be going?" He had eaten and drunken to his apparent refreshment, and he was now ready to push on.

Egeria cast a look out of the window, and rose languidly.

"I'd ask you to stay," said the teacher, taking note of her weariness, "but the children will be coming very soon, and"—

"Oh, no, no! we couldn't stay. We must go."

The teacher took down her waterproof from the peg on which she had hung it, and, eyeing it a moment thoughtfully, handed it to Egeria. "I want you should wear this. You 'll take your death if you go out that way. You can give it to the depôt man at Vardley Station, and tell him it 's Miss Thorn's. He 'll send it back by the stage this afternoon, and I 'll get it in plenty of time." Egeria did not reply, but stood looking at the teacher with a jaded and wondering regard.

"I will take it for her, Miss Thorn," said the doctor, advancing with a sprightly air, and receiving the cloak. "I will see that it is duly returned. And let me thank you," he added, "for your kindness at a time when, really, we should have been embarrassed without it. My name is Boynton,—Dr. Boynton. Though you can scarcely have heard of it."

"No," said the teacher, reluctantly, but firmly.

"Ah!" returned the doctor. But he did not attempt to enlighten her ignorance. He said, "Come, Egeria," and led the way to the door. The girl turned and looked vaguely at the teacher; but no words of farewell or of thanks passed between them.

The doctor issued cheerfully, even gaily, from the school-house door. The wind had changed, and was blowing from the south. Whiffs of white cloud were sailing far overhead in the vast expanse of blue, from which poured a mellow sunshine. The snow, translucent in the light, and dark blue in the shadow, clung lazily to the trees and the eaves, from which at times the breeze detached it, and tossed it away in soft, large clots. Some unseen crows made themselves heard in the distance; near by, on the fence, a little bird stooped and sang.

"A bluebird!" cried Boynton.

"Yes," answered the teacher; "there were a good many yesterday, before the weather changed. Robins, too."

He made her an airy bow, and Egeria looked back at her over her shoulder as they walked out into the road. "Why, the snow-plough has gone by!" he exclaimed, with simple delight in the effect, and the teacher saw him stop and point out to Egeria the drift, massively broken, and flung on either side in moist blocks by the plough. She watched them from the school-house door-way till a turn of the road hid them from sight. Then she went within, and cast a doubtful glance at the peg where her waterproof had hung.

But her face changed as her eye fell to the staunch and capacious rubber-boots standing in order below the peg. "I don't believe that girl had the sign of a rubber!" she mused aloud, in the excess of her compassion.

## XI.

THE adventure of the day before and the exercise of their night-walk, with the good breakfast he had eaten, seemed to have brightened Boynton past recollection of all the sorrows he had known. He went forward, discoursing hopefully, and developing a plan he had for leaving Egeria with her grandfather, and returning to this region in order to look up the Shaker community, with which he intended to unite for the purpose of spiritual investigation on the true basis. For some time he did not observe that she responded more languidly and indifferently than her wont; then he asked abruptly, "What is the matter, Egeria?"

"I don't know. Nothing. I am not very well."

"You ought to be, in such air as this. Let me see." He caught up her wrist. "Rather a quick pulse; it may be the walking. Are you hot?"

"My feet are cold,—they 're wet."

He looked down at her shoes, and shook his head in a perplexed fashion. "We must stop somewhere and dry your feet."

"They wouldn't let us," said Egeria, in a dull way.

"We will stop at that tavern. Perhaps we can get a lift there with some one going to the station." He took her hand under his arm, and helped her on. She did not complain, nor did she show any increasing weariness.

They had been passing through a long reach of woodland that stretched away on either side of the road, when they came to a wide, open plateau, high and bare. It looked old, and like a place where there had once been houses, though none were now in sight; from time to time, in fact, the ruinous traces of former habitations showed themselves by the wayside. A black fringe of pines and hemlocks bordered the plain where it softly rounded away to the eastward; a vast forest of oak and chestnut formed its western boundary. At its highest point they came in sight of a house on its northern slope, a large, square mansion of brick; an enormous elm almost swept the ground with its boughs, on its eastern side; before it stood an old-fashioned sign-

post, and westward, almost in the edge of the forest, lay its stabling.

"That must be the tavern," said Boynton, instinctively making haste towards it. As they drew near, they saw a light buggy standing at the door, and a man who seemed to unite the offices of host and ostler holding the horse by the head. He turned from smoothing the animal's nose, and called to some one within, "Come, hurry up in there!" A red-faced man, in the faded and mis-shapen clothes which American manufacture and the clothing store supply to our poor country-folks, issued from the door, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand, and slouched away down the road. Then a girl, dressed in extreme fashion, of the sort that never convinces of elegance, nor ever mistakes itself for it, with her large hands cased in white gloves, came out and waited to be helped into the buggy. The thick, hard bloom on her somewhat sunken cheeks was incomparably artificial, till the dyed moustache of the man following her showed itself; this was of a purple so bold that if his hair had been purple too, and not of a light sandy colour, it could not have looked falser. They had a little squabble, half-jocose, which the man at the horse's

head admired, before he lifted her to the seat. The landlord handed him the reins.

"Well, give us another call, Bob," he said.

The other looked at him over his dyed moustache without answering, while the girl stared round with her wild black eyes, as if startled at finding herself perched so high up in the light of day. Both at the same time caught sight of Boynton and Egeria, who fell behind her father as he approached the door-way. The man leaned toward the girl and whispered something to her, at which she gave him a push and bade him stop his fooling.

"Can I get a conveyance here to carry us to Vardley Village?" asked Boynton, accosting the landlord.

"I don't know," answered the man, looking doubtfully at the doctor and Egeria. He turned his back on them in the manner of some rustics who wish to show a sovereign indifference, and made a pace or two towards the door, before he half faced them again.

"Well, good-by, Tommy!" said the man in the buggy, drawing his reins, and then checking his horse. "Look here, will you?"

The landlord went back, and the man

leaned over the side of the buggy and said something in a low tone.

"No!" cried the landlord.

"Bet you anything on it!" said the man. "Get up!" He drove away.

"Come in," said the landlord to the doctor, "and I'll see."

Egeria shrank from following her father, who was mechanically obeying, and murmured something about walking.

"Oh, come in, come in!" said the landlord, more eagerly. "I guess I can manage for you. Come in and rest ye, any way."

"Come, Egeria," said her father.

The landlord was a short, stout man, with a shock of iron-grey hair and a face of dusky red, coarse and harsh; his blood-shot eyes wandered curiously over Egeria's figure. He led the way into the parlour of the tavern, which within had an air of former dignity, as if it had not been built for its present uses. The hall was wide and the staircase fine; the chimney-piece and wooden cornice of the parlour showed the nice and patient carpentry of seventy-five years ago. There was a fire in the sheet-iron stove on the hearth, and the lady who had just driven off in the buggy had left proof of a decided taste in perfumes. If Egeria had liked she

might have dressed her hair at the glass in which this person had surveyed the effect of her paint, with the public comb and brush on the table before it. There were some claret-coloured sporting prints on the wall, and some tattered, thumb-worn illustrated papers on the centre-table.

"I'll tell ye what," said the landlord, who had briefly disappeared after showing them into this room, and had now returned, "I hain't got any hoss in now, but I'll have one in in about an hour, and then I'll set ye over to Vardley."

"What will you charge?" asked the doctor.

"It ain't a-goin' to cost ye much. I d' know as I'll ask ye anything. I'm goin' there, any way; and I guess we can ride three on a seat."

Boynton expressed a flowery sense of this goodness, but said that they should insist upon paying him for his trouble. Egeria had dropped into the rocking-chair beside the window, and, propping her arm on the window-sill, supported her averted face on her hand. Her head throbbed, and the thick, foul sweetness of the air made her faint; the glare of the sun from the snow and gathering pools beat into her heavy eyes.

"Does your head ache?" asked her father.

"Yes," she gasped.

"I 'll send in some tea," said the landlord.

A black man brought it; there seemed to be no women about the house.

The landlord went and came often; through her pain and lethargy, the girl had a dull sense of his vigilance. Her father found her feverish, and no better for the tea she drank. He fretted and repined at her condition, and then he grew tired of looking at her pale face fallen against the chair-back, and her closed eyes, that trembled under their lids, and now and then sent out a gush of hot tears. He went into the other room, where the landlord sat with his boots on the low, cast-iron stove, and a white-nosed bull-dog slept suspiciously in a corner. As the time passed, different people appeared within and without the tavern. A man in a blood-stained over-shirt drove a butcher's wagon to the door; a tall man, in a silk hat, came with a fish cart painted black and varnished. With a blithe jingle of bells, a young fellow rattled up with a cracker wagon, and having come in for the landlord's order—the landlord did not find it necessary to take down his feet from the stove, or to disturb the angle at which his hat rested on his head, during

the transaction—he danced a figure on the painted floor, and caressed the bull-dog with the toe of his boot. "Next time you put up Pete," he said, "I want to bring my brother's brindle. I want *him* to wear the belt a spell. Pete must be gittin' tired of it. Well, I wouldn't ever said a dog-fight could be such fun," he added, with an expression of agreeable reminiscence. "And the old ball-room 's just the place for it." He spat on the stove, and taking under his arm the empty cracker-box, which he had just replaced on its shelf with a full one, he went out as he had come in, without saluting the landlord. He stopped at the open door of the parlour, and catching sight of Egeria made her a bow of burlesque devotion, and turned to include the landlord in the fun with a parting wink.

Egeria had not seen him; her eyes were closed; and her father, where he sat in the office, was looking impatiently out of the window. The sky had begun to thicken again.

"Do you think it 's going to rain?" he asked, when the cracker wagon had jingled away.

"Shouldn't wonder," said the landlord.

"I hope your conveyance will be here

room," pursued the doctor. "I 'm anxious, on my daughter's account, not to miss the train from Vardley that connects with the Portland express."

"Daughter, eh?" said the landlord, with a certain intonation; but Dr. Boynton observed nothing strange in it.

"How soon do you think your horse will be here?" he asked.

"I can't tell ye," said the landlord doggedly.

"You *did* tell me," retorted Boynton, "that it would be here in less than an hour. You have detained us that time already, and now you say you don't know how much longer I must wait.

"Now, look here," began the other, taking down his feet from the stove.

"I wish to pay you for what accommodation we have had. I wish to go," said the doctor, angrily.

"I don't want ye should go!" replied the other, with a stupid air of secrecy.

"I 've nothing to do with that," said the doctor. "I am going. Here is the money for your tea." He flung upon the counter the pieces of scrip which the school-teacher had given him.

The landlord rose to his feet. "Ye can't

go. I might as well have it out first as last. Ye can't go."

"Can't go? You're ridiculous!" Boynton exclaimed. "What's the reason I can't go?"

"Well, you can go, but the girl can't,—not till the off'cers comes. I mean to say," he added, at Dr. Boynton's look of amaze, "that she's no more your daughter than she is mine. I d'know where you picked her up, but she's one of the girls that's escaped from the reform school, and she's goin' back there as soon as the off'cers gets here. That's what's the matter."

"And do you mean to say that you are going to detain us here against our will?"

"I don't know what you call it. I'm going to keep you here." He had planted his burly bulk in the door-way leading into the hall.

"Stand aside," said Boynton, "or I'll take you by the throat."

"I guess not," returned the landlord coolly. "Pete!" The brute in the corner had opened his whitish, cruel eyes at the sound of angry voices. "Watch him!" The dog came and lay down at his master's feet, with his face turned toward Boynton. "There! I guess you won't take anybody

by the throat *much!*" The man resumed his chair, which he tilted back against the counter at its former comfortable angle.

Boynton quivered with helpless indignation. "Is it possible," he exclaimed, "that an outrage like this can be perpetrated at high noon in the heart of Massachusetts?"

"That's about the size of it," returned the landlord, with a grin of brutal exultation.

"I must submit," said the doctor. "But you shall answer for this." The man was silent, and the doctor fancied that he might perhaps be relenting. He poured out a recital of the whole misadventure that had ended in their coming to his door, and appealed to him not to detain them. "My daughter has been sick, and she is now far from well. I am most anxious to pursue our journey. We have no friends in this region, and we are out of money. Let us go now, and I will consent to overlook this outrageous attempt upon our liberty. If we lose the train this afternoon, she may suffer very seriously from the delay and the disappointment."

"She 'll be all right when she gets back to the reform school," answered the landlord, as if bored by the long story.

Boynton's self-command failed him. He burst into tears. "My God!" he sobbed, "have I fallen so low as this?—impostor, and tramp, and beggar, and now the captive, the slave, of this ruffian! It 's too much! What have I done, — what have I done!" He hid his face in his hands, and bowed himself abjectly forward in the chair into which he had sunk.

Some one drove up to the door, and shouted from the outside, "Hello!"

The landlord rose, and saying to his dog, "Stay there," went out to the door, and after a brief parley came in again with two other men. Their steps sounded as if they went to the door of the parlour and looked in, while their voices sank to rapid whispers. In his agony of anxiety, Boynton made an involuntary movement forwards; the dog growled and crept nearer. He was helpless; but the steps returned to the outer door, and there a voice said, "No, I don't want to see *him*, as long as 't ain't the girl. Somebody 's made a dumn fool of *you*, Harris, and you 've made dumn fools of *us*. Guess you better wait a while, next time."

The landlord came sulkily back, and sat down in his chair, which he tilted against the counter as before. Boynton suffered

some time to elapse before he asked, "Well, sir, do you mean to let us go?"

"Who 's henderin' you?" sullenly demanded the landlord, without moving.

"Then call away your dog."

The landlord refused, out of mere brutish wantonness, to comply at once; but he presently did so, and followed Boynton to the parlour. Then, according to Boynton's report, ensued a series of those events of which the believers in such mysteries fiercely assert the reality, and of which others as strenuously deny the occurrence. The sky darkened; there was a noise like the straining of the branches of the elms beside the house; but there was no wind, and the boughs were motionless. Presently this straining sound, as if the fibres were twisting and writhing together, was heard in the wood-work of the room.

"What the hell is that?" cried the landlord. The room was full of it, whatever it was; every part of the wood-work—doors, window casings, cornice, wainscot—was now voluble with a muffled detonation.

"Wait!" Boynton answered. The sound beat like rain-drops on the floor, at which the landlord stared, with the dog whimpering at his heels. Egeria lay white and still

in the rocking-chair by the window. At the sound of their voices she stirred and moaned; then, as Boynton asserted, they saw the marble top of the centre-table lifted three times from its place; a picture swung out from the wall, as if blown by a strong gust; and the brush from the table was flung across the room, flying close to the dog's head; with a howl, he fled out-of-doors.

"For God's sake, man, what is it?" gasped the landlord, seizing Boynton's arm, and cowering close to him.

"I forgive you, I bless you!" cried the other, rapturously. "It was from your evil that this good came. It's a miracle; it's —it's the presence of the dead."

"No, no!" protested the landlord. "I've kept a hard place; there's been drinkin' and fancy folks; but there hain't been no murder,—not in *my* time. I can't answer for it before that; they always tell about killin' peddlers in these old houses. Oh! Lord have mercy!" A flash of red light filled the world, and a rending burst of thunder made the house shake. The electricity appeared to rise from the ground, and not to come from the clouds; it was, as sometimes happens, a sole discharge. The landlord turned, and followed his dog out-

of-doors. The negro was already there, looking up at the house.

Egeria started from her chair. "Did you will it, father,—did you will it?" she implored, at sight of Dr. Boynton's wild face.

"No; it has come without motion of mine," he answered with a solemn joy. "I have never seen or heard anything like it." He looked round the room, in which an absolute silence now prevailed.

The girl shuddered. "I have had a horrible dream. The house seemed full of drunken men—and women—like that girl in the buggy; and we couldn't get away, and you couldn't get to me, and—oh!" She shook violently, and hurried on her hat and waterproof. "Come! I can't breathe here."

As they passed out the landlord made no motion to detain them; he even shrank a few paces aside. When Boynton looked back from the next turn of the road, he saw him walking to and fro before the tavern, looking up now and then at its front, and taking unconsciously the cold rain that lashed his own face as he turned eastward again. He was in a frame of high exultation; he shouted in talk with Egeria, who scarcely answered, as she pressed forward with her head down.

The snow dissolved under the rain and flooded the road, in which they waded, plunging on and on. They came presently to a lonely country graveyard, where the soaked pines and spruces dripped upon the stones, standing white and stiffly upright where they were of recent date, and where darkened with the storms of many seasons slanting in various degrees of obliquity to a fall. Here was one of those terrible little houses in which the hearse, the bier, and the sexton's tools are kept; Boynton tried the door, and when it yielded to his battering he called to his daughter to take shelter with him there.

"No!" she shouted back to him, "I would rather die!" She pushed, she knew not whither, down the road that wound into a stretch of pine forest, and he must needs follow her. At last they came to a hollow through which a brook, swollen by the snow and rain, rolled a yellow torrent. They stopped at the brink in despair; there was no house in sight, but on a knoll near by the trees stood so thick that the rain-fall was broken by the densely interwoven boughs.

The doctor led Egeria to this shelter, and placed her in the driest spot; he felt her shiver, and heard her teeth chatter, as the waves of cold swept over her. He left her

fallen on the brown needles, and went and tried the depth of the stream with a stick; the rain dripped from him everywhere,—from his elbows, from the rim of his silk hat, and from the point of his nose; he looked at once weird and grotesque.

"Heh!" cried a loud voice behind him. In a covered wagon crouched the figure of a young man in manifold capes and wraps of drab and blue, under the sweep of a very wide-brimmed hat. He had almost driven over Boynton. "Tryin' for water, with a hazel-rod? Guess you'll find it most anywheres to-day."

The voice was pleasant, and Boynton, looking up, confronted a cheery face in the wagon. "I was seeing if it was too deep to cross."

"'T ain't for the horses," said their driver. "Get in." He moved hospitably to one side. "You can't make me any wetter."

"Thank you," said Boynton. "I have my daughter here under the pines."

"Your daughter?" The young man in the wagon looked at first puzzled, and then, as he craned his neck round the side of the curtain and saw the little cowering heap which was Egeria, he looked daunted, but he only said, "Bring her too."

Boynton gathered her into his arms, and placed her on the seat between him and the driver. "We were going to Vardley Station," he explained. "Is this the way?"

"It 's *one* way," said the other, driving through the torrent. "But I guess you better stop with us till the rain's over. We 'll be home in half a mile."

"You are very good," said Boynton, looking at him. "We must push on. We must get back to the Junction in time for the Portland express." He once more gave the facts of their mischance.

When he had ended, "Oh, yee," said the other; "you are the friend that was speakin' to some of our folks at the Junction."

The doctor started. "Your folks? What are you?"

"Shakers."

"Egeria! Egeria!" shouted her father. "I have found them! This gentleman is a Shaker! He is taking us to the community! I accept, sir, with great pleasure. I shall be glad to stop and see more of your people. Egeria!" She made no answer. Her limp and sunken figure rested heavily against the young Shaker; her head had fallen on his shoulder.

"*I* guess she 's fainted," he said.

## XII.

EGERIA had not fainted, but she had lapsed into a torpor from which she could not rouse herself. She could not speak or make any sign when her father drew her head away from the young man's shoulder and laid it on his own. The Shaker chirped his reeking horses into a livelier pace, and when he reached the office in the village he sprang from the wagon with more alertness than could have been imagined of him, and ran in-doors to announce his guests.

Brother Humphrey and the three office sisters,[1] very clean and very dry, with the warm smell of a stove fire exhaling from their comfortable garments, received him

[1] In placing some passages of his story among the Shakers of an easily recognisable locality, the author has avoided the study of personal traits, and he wishes explicitly to state that his Shakers are imaginary in everything but their truth, charity, and purity of life, and that scarcely less lovable quaintness to which no realism could do perfect justice.

with countenances in which resignation blended with the natural reluctance of people within to have anything to do with people without, in such weather.

"Oh, better put them in the tramps' house," said Brother Humphrey,—"there 's a fire there."

"Yee," consented one of the sisters, "they will do very well there."

"They would slop everything up here," said another, "and we 've just been over our floors, Laban."

The third was silent, but she wrung her hands in nervous anxiety, like one who would not be selfish, and yet would like whatever advantage may come of selfishness.

"Nay," said Laban, "they 're not tramps. They 're the folks that Joseph and Elihu told about meetin' yesterday. I don't know as you 'd ought to put them with the tramps. I guess the young woman 's in a faint."

"Oh, why didn't you say so, to begin with, Laban?" lamented that one of the sisters who had not yet spoken. "Of course she 's sick, and here we 've been standin' and troublin' about our clean floors, and lettin' her suffer. I don't see how I can bear it."

"Oh, you 'll be over it by fall, Frances," answered Laban, jocosely. Humphrey caught

up a cotton umbrella, vast enough for community use, and weather-worn to a Shaker drab, and sallied out to the gate. The doctor and Laban got their benumbed burden from the wagon between them, and carried Egeria into the house, where they were met with remorseful welcome by the sisters. They despatched Brother Humphrey to kindle a fire in the stove of the upper chamber, reserved for guests, and into its sweet fresh cleanliness Frances presently helped Egeria, and then helped her into bed, while the others went to make her a cup of tea.

Her father, meanwhile, had taken off his wet clothes, and arrayed himself in a suit belonging to one of the brethren, a much taller and a thinner man than Boynton, who made a Shaker of novel and striking pattern in his dress. But he beheld his appearance in the glass, which meagrely ministered to the vanity of the office guests, with uncommon content, as a token that he had already entered upon a new and final stage of investigation; and when his tongue had been loosed by the cup of tea brought to him in the office parlour, he regarded his surroundings with as great satisfaction. This room was carpeted, but it was like the rest of the house in its simple white walls and its plain finish

of wood painted a warm brown; there were braided rugs scattered about before the stove and the large chairs, as there were at the foot of the stair-ways, and at the bedsides in the chambers above. Dr. Boynton, stirring his tea, walked out into the low, long hall, bare but not cheerless, and traversed it to look into the room on the other side; then he returned to the parlour, and glanced at the books and pamphlets on the table,—historical and doctrinal works relating to Shakerism, periodicals devoted to various social and hygienic reforms, and controversial tracts upon points in dispute between the community and the world; there were several weekly newspapers, and Boynton was turning over one of them with the hand that had momentarily relinquished his teaspoon when Brother Humphrey rejoined him.

"If we could have at all helped ourselves," he began promptly, "I should consider our intrusion upon you most unwarrantable; but we had no will in the matter."

"Nay," replied the Shaker, "it's no intrusion. This is not a family house. We call it the office, for we do our business and receive friends from the world outside here."

"Do you mean that you keep a house of entertainment?"

"Our rule forbids us to turn any one away. Of late years, the wayfaring poor have increased so much that we have appointed a small house especially for them; but we cannot put everybody there."

"I thank you," said Boynton.

"It is not a hotel," continued Humphrey, "for we make out no bills. All are welcome to what we can do; those who can pay may pay."

"I shall wish to pay, as soon as we can recover our effects," Boynton interposed.

"Nay, I did not mean that," quietly rejoined the Shaker. "You are welcome, whether you pay or not."

Boynton turned from these civilities. "I am glad to find myself here. I met two of your number yesterday, and had some conversation with them on a subject that vitally interests me."

"Yee, I heard," said the Shaker. "You are spiritualists. Are you the medium?"

"My daughter is a medium,—a medium of extraordinary powers, which I dare not say I have developed, but to which I have humbly ministered; powers that within the last hour have received testimony of the most impressive and final nature." Brother Humphrey made no outward sign of any

inward movement that Boynton's words might have produced, and the latter suddenly demanded, "Are you a spiritualist?"

"Yee," answered the Shaker, "we are all spiritualists."

"Then you will be interested—you will all be interested intensely— in the communication which I shall have to make to your community. I wish you to call a meeting of your people, before whom I desire to lay some facts of the most astounding character, and to whom I wish to propose myself for admission to your community, in order to the pursuance of investigations profoundly interesting to the race."

He paused, full of repressed excitement; but Brother Humphrey was not moved. "There will be a family meeting to-morrow night," he began.

"To-morrow night!" cried Boynton. "Is it possible that you are so indifferent to phenomena that ought to be instantly telegraphed from Maine to California? That"—

"We have heard a good deal of the doings with the spirits in the world outside," interrupted the Shaker, in his turn, "and we know how often folks are deceived in them and in themselves. If something new and important has happened to you, I guess it'll

keep for twenty-four hours." Brother Humphrey smiled quaintly, and seemed to expect his guest to take this common-sense view of the matter.

"Oh, it will keep!" exclaimed the doctor. "But so would the thunder from Sinai have kept!" He plunged into a vivid and rapid narration of the events of his captivity and release at the tavern.

When he paused, the Shaker replied with unperturbed calm: "These are things to be judged of by the family. I cannot say anything about them."

"Is it possible?" demanded Boynton, in a tone of indescribable disappointment. He seemed hurt and puzzled. After a while he said, "I submit. Could you let me have writing materials to take to my room? I wish to make some notes."

"Yee," said Humphrey.

Boynton went to his room, which was across a passage-way from that where one of the sisters was still busy with Egeria, and he did not reappear till dinner, which was served him in the basement of the office, in a dining-room made snug with a stove-fire. As Boynton unfolded his napkin, "What are your tenets?" he abruptly demanded of the sister who came to wait upon him.

"Tenets?" faltered Rebecca.

"Your doctrine, your religious creed."

"We have no creed," replied the sister.

"Well, then, you have a life. What is your life?"

"We try to live the angelic life," said Rebecca, with some embarrassment: "to do as we would be done by; to return good for evil; to put down selfishness in our hearts."

"Good, very good! There could be no better basis. But as a society, a community, what is your central idea?"

"I don't know. We neither marry *nor* give in marriage."

"Yes, yes! That is what I thought. That was my impression. I fully approve of your system. It is the only foundation on which a community can rest. And to keep up your numbers you depend upon converts from the world?"

"Yee."

"But you bring up children whom you adopt?"

"Yee."

"Do they remain with you?"

"We have better luck with those who are gathered in after middle life. The young folks—we are apt to lose them," said the Shakeress, a little sadly.

"I see, I see!" returned Boynton. "You cannot fight nature unassisted by experience. Life must teach them something first. They fall in love with each other?"

"They are apt to get foolish," the sister assented. "And then they run off together. That is what hurts us. They no need to. If they would come and tell us"—

Boynton shook his head. "Impossible! But you have the true principle. Celibacy is the only hope of communism,—of advanced truth." He ceased to question her as abruptly as he began; but after he had despatched his dinner, he asked leave to borrow from the parlour a work on Shakerism which he had noticed there, and he again shut himself up in his room. That evening they heard him restlessly walking the floor.

The sister who visited Egeria last had stood a moment shading her lamp with her hand and looking down on the girl's beauty. Her yellow hair strayed loosely out over the pillow; her lips were red and her cheeks flushed. The sister's tresses had been shorn away as for the grave thirty years before, and her face had that unearthly pallor which the Shaker sisters share with nuns of all orders. She stooped and kissed Egeria's hot cheek, and then went down to the office

sitting-room to report her impressions to the other sisters before they slept.

"It appears as if her father didn't want to go to bed," said Sister Diantha, after a moment's quiet, in which the doctor's regular tread on the floor overhead made itself audible.

"If he 's got anything on his mind," said Sister Rebecca, "it ain't his daughter."

"Yee," Rebecca," said Sister Frances, "you 're right there. I told him I thought she was going to have a fit of sickness, but he said it wa'n't anything but exhaustion, and 't he 'd see after her ; 't he was a doctor himself. To my knowledge he hain't been near her since. *I* think she 's goin' to have a fit of sickness."

Brother Humphrey came in from the next room and stood by the stove. "How did you leave her, Frances?" he asked.

"Well, *I* think she 's goin' to have a fit of sickness," repeated Frances.

"Well, I don't know 's you 'd have much to say agin that, would you?" returned the brother, after a general pause. "You hain't had a good fit of sickness on hand for quite a spell."

The other sisters laughed. "Set down, Humphrey," said Diantha, putting him a

chair. The manner of these elderly women with Humphrey was of a truly affectionate and sisterly simplicity, to which he responded with brotherly frankness.

"*I* guess she ain't goin' to be very sick," resumed Humphrey, making himself easy in his chair. "Any way, we 've got a doctor to prescribe for her."

"What *do* you think of him, Humphrey?" asked Rebecca.

"Pretty glib," said Humphrey.

"I don't know as I ever heard better language," suggested Frances.

"Oh, his *language* is good enough," said Humphrey.

"It 's quite a convert Laban 's brought us," observed Diantha. "Talk of winter Shakers!" she continued, referring to that frequent sort of convert whose Shakerism begins and ends with cold weather. "I hain't seen any one so ready to be gathered in for a long time."

"Yee, too ready," said Humphrey, soberly. "That kind ain't apt to stay gathered in; and I 'm about tired havin' the family fill mouths for a month or two, and afterwards revilin's proceed out of 'em."

"We must receive all, and try all," interposed Frances, gently.

"Yee," sighed Humphrey.

"What do you say to his story?" asked Diantha.

"I don't judge it," said the brother. "We know that spirits do communicate with men, and miracles happen every day. As to the doin's at the Elm Tahvern, Harris might tell a different story."

"I shouldn't believe any story Harris told," said Frances.

Humphrey smiled. "Well, I don't know as *I* should, come to look at it," he admitted.

"I wish that nest could be broken up," said Rebecca. "It 's a cross."

"Yee, it 's a cross," answered Humphrey. "I most drove over a man, dead drunk, in the road yesterday, comin' down into the woods, after I passed the tahvern; and nearly all the tramps that come now smell of rum. The off'cers don't seem to do anything."

"Oh, the off'cers!" cried Diantha.

The walking had continued regularly overhead; but now, after some hesitation, the steps approached the door, which was heard to open, and they crossed the hall to Egeria's room. From thence, after a brief interval, they descended the stairs, and Dr. Boynton,

lamp in hand, entered the room. The sisters rose in expectation.

"I find my daughter in a fever," said Boynton, with an absent air. "What medicines have you in the house?"

"We have our herbs," answered Sister Frances. "They may be the best thing," said Boynton, with the same abstraction, as if he were thinking of something else at the same time. He stood and waited amid a general silence, till Sister Frances, who had gone out, reappeared with some neat packages of the medicinal herbs which the Shakers put up. He chose one, and asked for some water in a tin dish in which to steep it on the stove.

"Let me do it for you," pleaded Sister Frances. The other sisters joined in an entreaty to be allowed to sit up with the sick girl.

"No," said Boynton. "I have always taken care of her, and to-night at least I will watch with her. I couldn't sleep if I went to bed, but I shall make myself easy in an arm-chair, if you'll give me one." Humphrey went to fetch the chair, and as he passed the door, on his way up-stairs with it, Boynton called out to him, "Thanks! If her fever increases," he continued to the

sisters, "she will wake at eleven, and then I shall give her this. I shall need nothing more. Good-night."

He went out, and Sister Frances said, with perhaps some sense of penalty in this loss of opportunity for nursing the girl through the night, "I feel to say that I was hasty in judgin' on him."

"Yee," said the others. "We judged him hastily."

"We were too swift to blame," said Humphrey, who now returned. "Let us remember it the next time."

"But," added Sister Frances, "I *knew* she was goin' to have a fit of sickness."

The sisters took each a kerosene hand-lamp, and passed up the bare, clean halls to their chambers. The brother went about trying the fastenings of the windows and the locks of the outer doors. The time had been, before the time of tramps, when he never turned a key at night.

In the morning Sister Frances made an early visit to Egeria's room, and found the girl and her father both awake. She was without fever now, but she lay white and still in her bed, and her father stood looking at her unhopefully.

Sister Frances went down to the kitchen,

where the other sisters were already busy getting Boynton's breakfast. "It 's goin' to be a fit of sickness," she said.

"Then she had best go to the sick-house," said Diantha.

"Yee," added Rebecca, at a look of protest from Frances, "that 's what it 's for, and she can be better done for there. It 's noisy here."

She urged that it was noisy when they spoke, later, of Egeria's removal to Boynton, who owned that he could not now say she would not be sick: it was the belief of the office sisters that they lived in the midst of excitement.

The day had broken clear, and the New England spring was showing herself in one of her moods of conscientious adherence to duty: she would perform her part with sunshine and birds, but she breathed cold across the brilliant landscape, and she warned vegetation that it started at its own risk. The Shaker village had awakened to its round of labours and self-denials as quietly as if it had not awakened at all. Some of the elderly men, with the boys and the hired hands, were at work with the cattle in the great barns; some were raking together the last year's decay in the garden into heaps for

burning ; some were busy in the workshops. The women went about their wonted cares in-doors, and there was no sign of interest in the arrival of guests at the office. Perhaps their presence had not been generally talked over in the family, but had been held in reserve for formal discussion at the meeting in the evening. The office sisters consulted with the eldress in the family house opposite in reference to Egeria's removal, and the infirmary was made ready for her. It was aired, the damp was driven out by a hot fire in the stove, and Sister Frances strove to set its order still more in order ; a little fluff under the bed or a spot upon the floor would have been a comfort to her ; but everything was blamelessly, hopelessly neat. It was not quite regular for her to take an interest in things outside of the office, but she had been suffered to do so much in consideration of her affliction at having a fit of sickness snatched from her care, as it were, and she was allowed a controlling voice in deciding upon the doctor's request to have a bed put up for him in the infirmary. Such a thing was hitherto unknown ; it was an invasion of family bounds by the world outside ; but it stood to reason that the girl's father had a double claim to be as near to her as possible,

and after some conscientious difficulty his request was granted.

While they were making ready for her, Brother Elihu came to see him at the office, and gave him a sort of conditional welcome. He seemed to be a person of weight in the community, and after his brief visit Boynton perceived that his standing was more strictly probationary than before. There was no want of kindness in Elihu's manner; he made several thoughtful suggestions for the welfare and convenience of the Boyntons; but he had shown no eagerness for the statement which the doctor wished to make to the community, nor for his ideas upon the development of spiritistic science. The statement, he said, could be made that evening, or at the next family meeting; it did not matter; there was no haste. "Spiritualism arose among us; our faith is based upon the fact of an uninterrupted revelation; the very songs we sing in our meetings were communicated to us, words and music, from the other world. We have seen much perversion of spiritualism in the world outside,—much error, much folly, much filth. If you have new light, it will not suddenly be quenched. Rest here a while. Our first care must be for the young woman."

"Yes, yes!" assented Boynton restively.

The office brothers and sisters had listened to Elihu with evident abeyance; only Sister Frances, by looks and tones, expressed herself unchanged to Boynton. As the time drew on toward evening, and Egeria seemed to need constant watchfulness, she offered to take his place at the infirmary, and to let him know if he was needed at any time during the meeting. This made it easy for him to go, and Sister Frances established herself in attendance upon the sick girl. She was not afterwards dislodged from her place in the infirmary. There were nurses whose duty it was to care for the sick, but Frances clung to her patient, not in defiance, but in a soft, elastic tenderness which served her as well.

Dr. Boynton went to the family meeting, and remained profoundly attentive to the services with which the speaking was preceded. He saw the sisters seated on one side of the large meeting-room, and the brothers on the other, with broad napkins half unfolded across their knees, on which they softly beat time, with rising and falling palms, as they sang. The sisters, young and old, all looked of the same age, with their throats strictly hid by the collars that

came to their chins, and their close-cropped hair covered by stiff wire-framed caps of white gauze; there was greater visible disparity among the brothers, but their heads were mostly grey, though a few were still dark with youth or middle life; on either side there was a bench full of sedate children.

When the singing was ended, the minister read a chapter of the Bible, and one of the elders prayed. Then a sister began a hymn, in which all the family joined. At its close, a young girl rose and described a vision which she had seen the night before in a dream. When she sat down, the elders and eldresses came out into the vacant space between the rows of men and women, and, forming themselves into an ellipse, waved their hands up and down with a slow, rhythmic motion, and rocked back and forth on their feet. Then the others, who had risen with them, followed in a line round this group, with a quick, springing tread, and a like motion of the hands and arms, while they sang together the thrilling march which the others had struck up. They halted at the end of the hymn, and let their arms sink slowly to their sides; a number of them took the places of those in the midst, and the circling dance was resumed, ceasing, and

then beginning again, till all had taken part in both centre and periphery; the lamps quivering on the walls, and the elastic floor, laid like that of a ball-room, responding to the tread of the dancers. When they went back to their seats, one woman remained standing, and began to prophesy in tongues. A solemn silence followed upon her ceasing, and then Brother Elihu rose, and said briefly that a friend from the world outside had a statement to make to the family, in the belief that he had arrived at central truths relating to spiritualism. He claimed to have been operating in a certain direction, with results as striking as they were unexpected. Elihu reminded them that as Shakers they had not been able to maintain a cordial sympathy with spiritualists in the world outside, who had too often abused to love of gain and the gratification of their pride and vanity the principle of spiritual communion originally revealed to Shakers. Yet they could not in reason refuse to hear the statement of this friend, who had, as it were, been providentially cast in their way, and who was apparently not moved by considerations of personal glory and profit, but who, from all he said, *had* the wish to remand the science into the keeping of Shakers, and to

pursue his own investigations under their auspices. Elihu spoke with neatness and point; he added some cautionary phrases against too hasty judgment of the facts about to be offered them, and warned them to beware of self-deception and the illusions arising from love of the marvellous, whether in their own hearts or the hearts of others.

Boynton could scarcely wait for him to have done. "I thank the brother," he said, in rising, "for admonishing us to beware of self-deception; it is an evil which in an inquiry like this would prove fatal, — which *does* prove fatal wherever it mingles with religious impulse; it poisons, it palsies, religious impulse. I have always guarded against it with anxious care, and, though sometimes abused by the deceit of others, I have at least no cause to accuse myself of want of vigilance concerning my own impressions. I regarded with sceptical scrutiny the first developments of spiritualism. I had been bred in the strictest sect of the Calvinists, from which I had revolted to the opposite extreme of infidelity; I was a materialist, believing in nothing that I could not see, hear, touch, or taste. I rejected the notion of a Supreme Being; I derided the hypothesis of immortality. The interest

which I had taken in mesmerism only intensified my contempt for the whole order of miracles, in all ages. I saw the effect of mind upon mind, of mind upon matter; but I saw that it was always the effect of earthly intellect upon earthly substance. I accounted even for the wonders performed by Christ and the Apostles by mesmerism, acting now upon the subjects of their cures and resuscitations, and now upon the imaginations of the spectators.

"When the new phenomena were forced upon my attention by their prevalence in so many widely separated places, under so many widely differing conditions, I began to study them as the effect of mind upon inanimate matter. I did not suffer myself to suppose a spiritual origin for these phenomena, for I would not suppose spirits. I imported into this fresh field of research the strict and hard methods with which I had wrought in the old.

"My wife died during the infancy of the daughter who is here with me now, the involuntary guest of your hospitality, and her death was attended by occurrences of a nature so intangible, so mysterious, so sacred, that I do not know how to shape them in words, but regarding which I may

safely appeal to your own spiritual experience. In the moment of her passing I was aware of something, as of an incorporeal presence, a disembodied life, and in that moment I believed! I accepted the heritage which she had bequeathed me with her breath, and I dedicated the child to the study of truth under the new light I had received.

"That child has been my mesmeric subject almost from her birth, and all my endeavours have latterly been to her development as a medium of communication with the other world. She was naturally a child of gay and sunny temperament, loving the sports of children, and fond of simple, earthly pleasures. She showed great aptness for study, —she liked books and school; and the ordinary observer would have pronounced her a hopeless subject for psychological experiment. But I argued that if spirit was truly immortal it was immutable, and that a nature like hers, warm, happy, and loving, would have the same attraction for persons in one world as in another. The event proved that I was not mistaken; from the first, disembodied spirits showed a remarkable affinity for hers, and the demonstrations, though inarticulate and indefinite, were of the most unusual order. They frightened and dis-

turbed her, and she did all that she could to escape from them. At different times, indeed, she effectually rebelled against my influence; and she was abetted in these periods of revolt by those who, after myself, were nearest and dearest to her. But in the end my influence always triumphed, for she loved me with the tender affection which her mother seemed to impart to her with the gift of her own life. I never appealed to this affection in vain, and I have seen her change from a creature of robust, terrestrial tendencies to a being of moods almost as ethereal as those of the spirits with which it has been my struggle to associate her.

"Her health has not always borne the strain well, and but for my own sustaining strength it must have given way completely. The conditions amidst which we lived were all unfavourable. I will not enter upon the long story of my own misfortunes. By the insidious operation of the prevailing bigotry, public confidence in me was undermined; I lost my practice; I was reduced to dependence upon her kindred, who were the bitterest of my antagonists, and who resisted by every means in their power my purpose of taking her away from them, and attempting her development in other circumstances.

But I prevailed, as I always prevailed when I made a final appeal to her affection. We came away, and entered upon the career, distasteful to us both, of public exhibitors. At first we met with great success in the small places which we visited, and I was induced to try our experiment in Boston. Here, too, we made a good impression; but almost at the outset, we encountered an influence, an enmity, embodied in a certain individual, against which we were almost powerless. To this antagonism was added the paralysing effect of fraud on the part of a medium who assisted at our principal séance.

"I saw, upon reflection, that we could not hope to succeed in the atmosphere of a mercenary, professional mediumism; and I determined to retire again to our village, and lay once more, however painfully and slowly, the foundations of our experiment. I dreamed of forming about me a community of kindred spirits, in which our work should be done unhindered by the selfish hope of gain, and I armed myself with patience for years of trial and discouragement.

"Brother Elihu will tell you how chance brought us together in the depot at Boston, and again at Ayer Junction; and I will not

detain you with the history of the seeming disasters which have ended in our presence among the only people who have conceived of spiritism as a science, and practised it as a religion. The mistake of a train going southward for a train going northward made us houseless and penniless wanderers; the cruel rapacity of a ruffian crowned our sufferings with a triumph surpassing my wildest hopes."

Dr. Boynton entered upon a circumstantial account of the strange occurrences at the Elm Tavern, and painted every detail with a vividness which had its effect upon his hearers. At the close, one of the sisters struck into a rapturous hymn, in which the others joined. He remained standing while they sang, and when their voices died away he continued in a low and grave tone:—

"What I wish now is simply to be received among you without prejudice, and to be allowed to carry out my plan with the powerful help of your sympathetic and intelligent sphere. I do not ask to be received out of charity: I am a physician, and I offer you my professional services at need; I have strong arms, and I am willing to work in your shops and your fields. But I feel myself here in presence of the right conditions,

and I would make any sacrifice, short of the sacrifice of self-respect, to continue here. I am intensely disappointed that neither my investigations nor my usefulness to you can begin at once. My daughter, as you know, lies sick in your infirmary, and my first, my whole duty is to her. As soon as she is well again, you shall have my labour, and the world shall have my truth."

He sat down. One of the elders rose, and, coming forward, said, "The thanks of the family are due to the friend for what he has spoken. The meeting is dismissed."

The brothers and sisters dispersed to their dwelling-houses, and Boynton walked alone to the infirmary. He found Sister Frances with his daughter, who was wakeful and in a high fever.

## XIII.

HER father watched over Egeria in her sickness with the mechanical skilfulness and the mental abstraction which the office sisters had seen in his treatment of her case from the first. He was at her bedside night and day while the danger lasted; he prepared the medicines himself and administered them with his own hand, and he waited their effect from hour to hour, almost from moment to moment, with anxious scrutiny. At the same time a second and more inward self in him remained at immeasurable remoteness. "I never see such doctorin' or such nursin'," said Sister Frances, in her daily report at the office; "but it don't seem, somehow, as if he did it for *her*. I should say—and perhaps I should say more 'n I ought if I *did* say it—'t he wanted her to get well, but 't he didn't want her to get well on her own account; well, not in the first *place*. And still he 's just as kind and good! Well, it 's perplexin'."

"I can't see," said Rebecca, carefully, "as we 've got any call to judge him, as long as he does his duty by her."

"That 's just where it is, Rebecca," answered Frances. "It does seem as if there was somethin' better than duty in this world. I d' know as there is, nor *what* it is; but it does seem as if there might be."

Boynton's efforts were bent not only to Egeria's escape from danger, but to her immunity from suffering, so far as he could avert it; and to this end he often used his mesmeric power with what appeared good effect. The rending headache yielded to the mystical passes made above her throbbing temples, or over her eyes that trembled with the hot pain; or perhaps it was only the touch of the physician's wise fingers that soothed them, and brought her the deep, strange sleep. But after the crisis of the fever, and when the convalescence began, the influence, whatever it was, ceased to relieve. It fretted instead of strengthening the girl in her climb up toward health, as her father was quick to perceive. He desisted, and he did not talk with her of the schemes and hopes that pre-occupied him. He scarcely talked of them at all, though now and then, when he met Elihu, it was

clear that he had not relinquished them in the slightest measure. The Shaker wondered at the self-control with which he cast them into such complete abeyance, and could not forbear suggesting at one of their encounters, "Your daughter's sickness is quite a little cross to your patience, Friend Boynton."

"Yes, yes," returned the other, intensely; "but it is not the first time I have had to use patience. The end is worth waiting for, and, as Humphrey said when we first talked of it, the end can wait for us; the truth will keep. I am sure of the result. But nothing can be done till she is perfectly well again."

"Yee," said Elihu; "the young woman's welfare is more precious than any proof she could give us of the existence of spirits. We know that they exist already."

They did not speak of Boynton's union with the family; that question shared the suspense in which the great problem, to the solution of which Shakerism had been only a means in his mind, was left. But he had taken his place in the community like one of them. There were reasons in the condition of the only suit of clothing which he brought from the world outside why he should continue to dress in the Shaker garb; but it is probable that he would have preferred to

wear it, even if the skill of the family tailoress could have rehabilitated the wreck of his secular raiment; and he was faithful in his attendance at all the religious meetings, both those held in the family-house and those opened to the public, with the advancing spring, in the meeting-house. He did not take an active part in the worship. Once, when asked to speak, he said briefly that for the present he had nothing to add to his first statement; and during the marching and singing he sat quietly in a corner, opposite a sister on the women's side, whose extreme stoutness had long excused her from dancing before the Lord. In the meantime he had treated several slight cases of sickness which occurred in the family; and he had drawn all the teeth in the head of a young sister much tormented with toothache, and long emulous of the immunity enjoyed by most of the other sisters through their full sets of artificial teeth. He had also, in his moments of disoccupation, and during his watches beside Egeria, made a profound study of the history and doctrine of Shakerism; and he grew into general liking with the family at large, whose knowledge of his devotion to his daughter did not search motive so jealously or fantastically as

that of Sister Frances, and who thought him a marvel of vigilance and skill.

April had passed, and May had worn away to its last weeks before the girl could sit up in an easy-chair, and with pillowed head look out on the landscape. Sometimes, after the favourable change in her fever began, she had asked, in the mellowing afternoons, to have her window opened to let in the rich, pungent odours of the burning refuse of the gardens,—the last year's withered vines and stalks, which the boys had raked into large piles, and fired in the field below the infirmary. She could hear, from where she lay, the snap and crackle of the flames; and once, when Sister Frances returned after a moment in which she had left the sick girl alone, she found that Egeria had dragged herself across the bed to where she could see the fire, upon which she was gloating with rapture. Frances spoke to her; she replaced her pillow, and after a long look at the Shakeress she broke into tears. The watchers with her in these early days of her convalescence always found her awake at dawn, when the robins and orioles and sparrows were weaving that fabric of song which seems to rise everywhere from the earth to the low-hovering heaven.

"It 's like the singin' of spirits, ain't it?" said one of the sisters who saw the transport with which she silently listened, her large eyes wide and her lips open.

"No!" cried the girl, almost fiercely. "It 's like the singing of the birds at home."

"Seemed as if she hated the spirits, as you might say," the Shakeress commented to the office sisters. It was the first time that any of them had heard Egeria mention her former home, for even in the fever her ravings had been of experiences in Boston unintelligible to them. But they had all noted the passion with which, when her recovery began, she turned to the natural world. She asked for the wild-flowers, and day by day demanded if it were not yet time for the anemones, the columbines, the dog-tooth violets. If the spring lingered, or at times turned backward, nothing could rouse her from the dejection into which she fell, till the sun began to shine and the birds began to sing again. It was felt in the family to be foolish, or worse, but none of the Shakers could come home through field or wood without staying to pluck some token of the season's advance for the sick girl, who was longing so restlessly to go out and find the summer for herself. Her bed was decked

with boughs of wilding bloom ; on the shelves and window-sills the sylvan and campestral flowers gave their delicate colours and faint fragrances in whatever prim jug or sober vase the community could spare from its service. Something, surely, must be wrong about all this ministering to a love that might be said to savour of earthly vanities, but the most anxious of the nun-like sisters could not determine upon the sin ; and while they wondered in just what sort they should deal with the elusive evil, a visiting brother from another community arrived to pronounce it no evil, but an instinct, wholesome as the harmless things themselves. Upon this, one of them brought and laid at Egeria's bedside a rug which she had worked with the pattern of a grape-vine, and which for five years she had kept fearfully hidden away in her closet, from compunction for its likeness to a graven image.

Egeria first went out on the 20th of May, that signal date when the spring, whatever her previous reluctances, brings up all arrears with the apple-blossoms. The season is then no longer late or early, but is the consummate spring ; and all weather-wise hopes and fears are lost in the richness with which she keeps the promise of her name. It might

well have seemed to the girl's impatience as she watched the orchard trees, sometimes from her closed window and sometimes from her open door, as the day was chill or soft, that the blossoms would never come; and even when every tip of the mossed and twisted boughs was lit with the pink glimmer of a bud, and the trees' whole round was suffused with a tender flush of colour, that the delicate petals of rose and snow would never unfold. The orioles and the bobolinks sang from the airy tops, and from the clover in the grassy alleys between the trees; in a neighbouring field the oats were already high enough to brighten and darken in the wind. The canes of the blackberries and raspberries in the garden were tufted with dark green, and beyond the broad leaves of the pie-plant and the neat lines of sprouting peas, the grape-vines on Elder Joseph's trellis were set thick with short, velvety leaves of pinkish-olive, when suddenly, in a warm night, the delaying buds unfolded, and in the morning the apple-blossoms had come.

"I am going out under them," the girl said, when she saw them, and she set a resolute face against the fond anxieties of Sister Frances. Her father came and approved her wish.

"It won't hurt her; it will do her good," he said, with that somewhat propitiatory acquiescence with which he now indulged his daughter's whims. So, when the morning was well warmed through, as Sister Frances said, they spread some sad-coloured wraps on the grass in the orchard, where the mingled wind and sun could reach her through the screen of blossoms. She walked a little tremulously, clinging to her father's arm, but a light of perfect happiness played over her faintly flushing face as she sank upon the couch. From where she lounged she could look across the gardened intervale, declining from the street on which the hamlet was built, to the elms and sycamores that fringed the river-course, and beyond to other uplands, where the grey farmsteads dimly showed among the fields, and the white houses of villages clustered and sparkled in the sun. An unspeakable serenity filled the scene; and round her the little Shaker town was a part of the wide peace. There was seldom a passer on the sandy thoroughfare, now printed with the delicate shadows of the new maple leaves, and the stillness was unbroken by any sound of human life. The Shakers and their hired men were at work in the gardens and the fields, but they worked

quietly; and the shops in which there was once the clinking of hammers on lapstone and anvil had been hushed long ago by the cheaper industries of the world outside.

At the doors of the great family houses of brick a Shaker sister in strict drab and deep bonnet from time to time issued or entered silently. Nothing but the cat-bird twanging in the elder-bushes, and the bobolinks climbing in the sunlit air, to reel and slide down, gurgling and laughing, to the clover tufts from which they rose, broke upon the mellow diapason of the bees in the apple-blossoms overhead. Where she lay, propped on her arm, with her father seated beside her, some of the brothers and sisters came out of their way from time to time, to welcome her outdoors, and to warn her not to stay too long. Some rumour of her longing to be in the weather, and of her passion for the blossoms and the birds amongst which she was blessed at last, had penetrated the whole community, and many who did not come to speak to her looked out unseen from their windows upon her happiness, which they might have found somewhat too earthly, in spite of the ideas lately promulgated by the visiting brother. With her blue eyes dreamily untroubled, she looked like some sylvan creature, a part of

the young terrestrial life that shone and sang and bloomed around her; while flashes of light and colour momently repaired the waste that sickness had made in her beauty. A sense of her exquisite harmony with the great natural frame of things may have penetrated the well defended consciousness of Elder Joseph, as he paused near her, on his way home to dinner; but if it did, it failed to grieve him. He looked indulgently down at her; by an obscure impulse he gathered some of the richest sprays from the branches at hand, and dropped them into her lap.

"It seems right," he said, "to be getting well in the spring, when everything is taking a fresh start. I like to see the young woman looking so happy."

He addressed the doctor as well as Egeria, but it was she who answered.

"Yes; it wouldn't seem the same thing if it were fall. If it had been fall, I should not have got well; I should not have cared to get well."

"Nay," replied the Shaker; "if it is for us to choose, we are to choose to get well at all times."

"I mean," said the girl, "that I could not have chosen."

"You can't tell," observed her father.

"Most fevers are autumnal, and convalescents are braced up by the approach of cold weather."

"Yes," she rejoined, "but now I seem to be stronger because my getting well is part of the spring."

"Our sympathetic relations with nature are subtle and strong," consented Boynton. "No one can tell just how much influence they have over our physical condition."

Egeria silently gazed upon the prospect. "It 's sightly, isn't it?" asked the Shaker. "I have looked at it now for fifty spring-times, and it is as pretty as when it was first revealed to me."

Boynton started, and repeated, "Revealed?"

"Oh, yee," returned the elder, "I first saw this place in a vision. It was when I was a young man, and several years before I was gathered in from the world outside. When I came here, I remembered the place and the persons I had seen in my vision, and I knew them all. Then I knew that it was meant, and I stayed."

"Is it possible!" cried Boynton. "That was very extraordinary. Have you had other psychological experiences?"

"Nay," said Brother Joseph briefly.

"But they are common among you?" pursued Boynton.

"Oh, yee, we have all had some such intimations. Have you never read Elder Evans's account of his dealings with the supernatural?"

"No, never!" cried Boynton, with intensifying interest.

"I will lend you the book. He tells some strange things. But we do not follow up such experiences. They serve their purpose, and that is enough. We try to live the angelic life. That will bring what is good in the supernatural to us, and we need not go to it."

"I think you make a mistake!" said Boynton promptly. "These intimations are given expressly to invite pursuit. That is what miracles are for."

"Nay," returned the Shaker. "They are no miracles, if you follow them up to see them a second time. We must beware how we make the supernatural a commonplace. None of the disciples knew exactly who Christ was till He was taken from them; and He has only appeared since to one Doubter out of all the millions that have longed to believe on Him. There is something in that. The other world cannot come twice to prove itself. Once is enough in miracles."

"Then you disapprove of spiritistic research?" demanded Boynton. "You condemn the desire to develop the dim hints of immortality which we all think we have received into certain and absolute demonstration?"

"Nay, I do not condemn any earnest striving for the truth, under proper conditions."

"I hope to find those conditions among you," Boynton hastened to say.

"We shall be happy to afford them," said the Shaker, smoothly, "if we can agree upon what they are. But it is right to say that we consider Shakerism the end and not the means of spiritualism." He passed on down the orchard aisle, the sunlight falling upon his quaint figure through the apple-blossoms.

Boynton's eyes followed him, but it was some time before he spoke. "After all," he said, as if musing aloud, "he is not one of the controlling forces of the community." He spoke with a certain effect of arming himself against opposition. "You had better come in now, Egeria. It won't do for you to take cold."

"Yes, pretty soon. I don't wonder that they think they 're living the angelic life."

"Why?" asked her father, sharply.

"It 's like a heaven upon earth here."

This vexed her father. "Yes, like heaven now, with the apples in bloom and the birds singing. But how much like heaven would it be with three feet of snow where you are lying?"

"Yes, let us go in. I had better not stay too long." She rose as if saddened by his words, and suffered herself to be helped back to the infirmary

"The Swedenborgians," said her father, in reparation, "believe that in the other world winter is absorbed into the other seasons, and that the whole year is a sort of spring-time."

"Ah!" breathed the girl. "But I didn't mean spring. I should want the whole year to be summer, and I should want it to be in this world. I should like a heaven upon earth."

Her father looked closely at her. "This materialistic tendency is a trait of your convalescence. People are never so earthly as when they are recovering from a dangerous sickness. There is a kind of revolt from the world whose borders they have touched,—a rebound. The senses are riotous to try their strength again." He said these things as if accounting to himself for a fact, rather than explaining her condition to Egeria.

"Well, we have a right to our life here!" she cried, passionately. "Let the other world keep to itself!"

He did not answer her directly, and at other times he avoided encounter with anything like opposition in her. She would not stay in-doors after she once liberated herself. The spring came on rapidly and brought the hot weather before its time; but she throve in the heat. Before she was strong enough to walk much the Shakers appointed for her use an open buggy, garrulous and plaintive with age, and an old horse past his usefulness at the plough, but very fit for lounging along by-roads, and skilled in cropping wayside foliage as he went. With her father beside her in his Shaker dress, while she wore a worldlier garb, which she had beguiled her convalescence in fashioning from materials supplied by the family dressmaker, she took the passers on the quiet roads with question and wonder. But they met few people, for they drove mostly over the grass-grown lanes that entered the forest, and the track oftener died away in the thickening vegetation than led any whither. Sometimes it arrived at a clearing deep in the woods, and accounted for itself as the way over which the teams had hauled wood

in the winter, or got out logs. In other places it was a fading reminiscence of former population, and led through the trees and thick undergrowth to the site of a vanished dwelling; a few apple-trees emerged from the ranks of their sylvan brethren; a rose or currant bush stood revealed among the blueberries or the sweet-fern; then the raw red and white of ruined masonry showed in the grass, and suddenly a cellar yawned before their feet, or they stepped over a well-curb choked with stones. Now and then they met lurking and evasive people on the lonesome roads, who were sometimes black, and who seldom seemed part of the ordinary New England life. If they followed up the track on which these men had shambled towards them, they might come upon a poverty-stricken dwelling of unpainted wood, which seemed never to have had heart to be a home. If they spoke to the slattern woman in the door-way, she was nasal enough, but otherwise the effect was as if some family of poor whites from the South had been dropped down in those Northern woods, with all its native environment of lounging dogs, half-starved colts, and frightened poultry.

Boynton philosophised the strange con-

ditions as well as he could in the absence of any but obvious facts concerning them. When he stopped for a dipper of water at the well, from which he drew it with the old-fashioned sweep, and fell into talk with the women, they were voluble, but not very intelligible. They commonly took him for a Shaker, but Egeria gave them pause in their conjectures; and when he explained that he and his daughter were merely staying with the Shakers they said, Well, the Shakers were good folks, any way. There was sickness in some of these forlorn places, and once it happened to the doctor to be able to afford relief in the case of a suffering child. He was very tender with it, and gentle with the parents, who looked as if they would still be young if they had any encouragement, and on a second visit they asked him what he charged. When he said, "Nothing," they followed him and Egeria out to their buggy in a sort of helpless gratitude.

"Well, you 've done our little girl good, doctor," the woman said on the door-step, "and we sha'n't forget it. The trouble is, we don't seem to get no ways forehanded."

Boynton looked about him, as he took the reins in his hand, upon two or three other

weather-beaten houses. "What place is this?" he asked.

"Well," said the woman, with sober apology, while her man grinned, "I d' know 's you may say it *has* any name. Skunk's Misery, they *call* it." She showed her sense of degradation in the brutal grotesquery. "Well, call again," she said, as the doctor lifted his reins and chirruped to the old horse. "And you, too, lady," she added, nodding to Egeria.

"She kept her house in good order for such a poor place," said the girl, when they had been watched out of sight by the man and his wife, "and the little girl's bed was sweet and clean. I should think they might be happy there."

"In Skunk's Misery?" asked her father.

"If the house is their own," answered Egeria, simply. "They seemed good to each other."

"Oh, you will change your mind when you 're quite well again. You will want to see more of the world."

"I wish we had a house of our own, somewhere," said Egeria. "I shouldn't care where. I was thinking of that. I should like to keep house. I am going to get Frances to teach me everything."

"That will all come in good time," answered her father, soothingly. "And it will come with higher things. Only now get well."

"What higher things?" demanded the girl.

Boynton looked at her, and answered evasively, "Things we couldn't very well find in Skunk's Misery. Perhaps we shall go abroad. Would you like to go to Europe?"

"I would rather go home."

Boynton frowned, but did not answer; and they had escaped encounter for that time, at least.

As Egeria grew stronger they gave up their drives somewhat, and took walks in the nearer woods. Oftenest their errand was to gather laurel, which was now coming richly into bloom. It filled the open spaces of the small clearings and wherever the woods were thin; it hid the stumps and consoled the poor, sterile soil with the starry profusion of its flower. One afternoon, when they had climbed to the hill-top where the Shakers of earlier times lay in their nameless graves, they looked out over the masses of the laurel, and it was like a second blossoming of the orchards. Egeria sat down on one of the fallen stones, without knowing

that it covered a grave, and began putting her boughs of laurel into shape, choosing this and rejecting that, while her father went about among the forgetful tombs.

"I am glad we came here," he said, returning to her, "for I should not have liked to miss seeing their graveyard."

"Their graveyard?" she repeated.

"Yes; this is the old Shaker burial-ground."

She looked round. "I didn't know it," she sighed like one following out some tacit thought. "Well, what difference would it make if they had put their names on? They rest as well without it. And if they had put their names, who could remember who they were in fifty years from now?"

"They know one another in the other world just as well, without the record here," consented her father. "And it isn't here that we are to be remembered, at any rate."

"I wish it were!" said the girl with passion, dropping her flowers into her lap. "I like this world, and I like to be in it. I wish we didn't have to die."

"Death is the condition of our advancement," said her father.

"But I would rather not advance," said Egeria. "I almost wish I had been born

an animal. I should have had to die, but I should not have known it, and there would have been nothing of me to come back!" She went on putting together her boughs of laurel, and she wore that look of being remote within her defences which a woman knows how to assume no less with her father than with her lover. She then adventurously throws out thoughts and opinions, as if they had just casually occurred to her, which she has perhaps reached after long, secret cogitation or sensation, or which are perhaps really what they seem.

"Why shouldn't you wish to come back, ages hence, and see what advance the world has made?" rejoined her father, after a pause.

"I should be afraid that I hadn't kept up with it," answered Egeria. "The spirits that come back say such silly things."

"That is a childish way of looking at it," said her father with severity. "We have no more right to accuse them of silliness than we have to laugh at the foreigner who can express only the simplest things in English. The medium of thought must be so different in the two conditions of being that the wonder is that returning spirits can understand and use our dialects at all."

"I don't see why they should forget their own language, if they 're the same persons there that they were here," Egeria returned, stubbornly. "Yes," she cried, "I would rather be here under the ground for ever than be like some of the spirits! Oh, I should like to live always too; but I don't call that living. I should like to live here in this world,—on the earth."

"Would you like to live always among the Shakers?" asked her father, willing to turn the current of her thoughts.

"They try all the time to make the other world of this world!"

"Perhaps that's the only condition on which they find happiness in this world."

"Perhaps. But I don't believe so. We were not born into the other world. The Shakers are very good, and they have been kind to us. Yes, I could be contented among them. Are you going to stay with them, father?"

"I don't know," replied Boynton. "The time hasn't come to decide yet. I have been waiting. There is no hurry. I don't feel that we are here on charity quite. I am able to render some equivalent."

"Yes," said Egeria, "and I am going to work as soon as they will let me. I know

they would like to have us stay and join them."

"That was originally my idea. I still propose to do so, if I find them useful. Everything depends"— He stopped uneasily, and glanced at Egeria, but she showed no uneasiness.

END OF VOL. I.

Edinburgh University Press:
T. AND A. CONSTABLE, PRINTERS TO HER MAJESTY.

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**15a CASTLE STREET, EDINBURGH.**

(*September* 1882.)

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